VERBS AND VERB TENSE DIFFICULTIES

The Infinitive

Although not properly speaking a verb tense, the infinitive is the starting point for building a knowledge of verb tenses; the infinitive is the most basic form of the verb. Some examples of infinitives are *to go, to be, to do, to begin, to come, to investigate*. The infinitive form remains the same, of course, whether the action referred to happens in the past, the present, or the future.

1. **split infinitives**: The most commonly made mistake involving infinitives is undoubtedly the slang substitution of *and* for *to*, especially in the expression *try and do it* for *try to do it* (see under Usage for a fuller treatment). The great issue in this area among grammarians, however, is the split infinitive—the infinitive which has another word or words inserted between *to* and the verb:

wrong The time has come to once again go to the polls. Economic conditions are likely to greatly influence the outcome, and the Prime Minister has promised to forcefully speak out in defence of the government's fiscal record.

With re-united infinitives, the same passage looks like this:

right The time has come to go once again to the polls. Economic conditions are likely to influence greatly the outcome, and the Prime Minister has promised to speak out forcefully in defence of the government's fiscal record.

On what grounds can the second passage be considered better? It comes down to a matter of sound and rhythm. To most ears *to go once again* and *to speak out forcefully* are preferable to the split alternatives, but *to influence greatly* seems more awkward than *to greatly influence*. Happily, most authorities are now agreed that it is not a grievous sin to split an infinitive; Philip Howard, editor of *The Times of London*, calls the split infinitive "the great shibboleth of English syntax," and even the traditionalist H.W. Fowler allows that while "the split infini-

tive is an ugly thing, we must warn the novice against the curious superstition that splitting or not splitting makes the difference between a good and a bad writer."

This is not to say that the splitting of infinitives should be encouraged. In many cases a split infinitive is a sign of wordiness; in cases such as the following it is better to drop the adverb entirely:

poor The Chair said it was important to really investigate the matter thoroughly.

better The Chair said it was important to investigate the matter thoroughly.

Like all verb forms, most infinitives have both an *active* and a *passive* voice. The active, which is more common, is used when the subject of the verb is doing the action, whereas the passive is used when the subject of the verb is receiving the action, or being acted on. *To do, to hit, to write* are examples of infinitives in the active voice, while *to be done, to be hit, to be written* are examples of infinitives in the passive voice.

The Simple Present Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I say	we say
2nd person	you say	you say
3rd person	he, she, it says	they say

2. **subject-verb agreement**: The simple present tense seems entirely straightforward, and usually it is. Most of us have no difficulty with the first person or the second person. But almost all of us occasionally have problems in writing the third person correctly. All too often the letter *s* at the end of the third person singular is left out. The simple rule to remember is that whenever you use a verb in the third person singular of the simple present tense, it must end in *s*.

wrong He go to Vancouver at least once a month.

right He goes to Vancouver at least once a month.

wrong The litmus paper change immediately when the solution is poured into the beaker.

right The litmus paper changes immediately when the solution is poured into the beaker.

(*Paper*, which is the subject, is an *it* and therefore third person singular.)

It is not particularly difficult to ensure that the subject agrees with the verb in the above examples, but even professional writers often have trouble with more complex sentences. Here are two common causes of subject-verb agreement errors:

(a) The subject and verb are separated by a long phrase or clause.

wrong The state of Afghanistan's roads reflect the chaotic situation.
right The state of Afghanistan's roads reflects the chaotic situation.

Here the writer has made the mental error of thinking of *roads* as the subject of the verb *reflect*, whereas in fact the subject is the singular noun *state*. *The state reflect* ... would immediately strike most people as wrong, but the intervening words have in this case caused grammatical confusion.

wrong As the statement by Belgium's Prime Minister about his country's deficit and unemployment problems indicate, many nations are in the same shape, or worse.
right As the statement by Belgium's Prime Minister about his country's deficit and unemployment problems indicates, many nations are in the same shape, or worse.
(The subject is the singular noun *statement*, so the verb must be *indicates* rather than *indicate*.)
wrong Courses offered range from the history of the Greek and Roman world to the 20th century, and covers Britain, Europe, North America, Africa, and the Far East. (History Dept. Prospectus, Birkbeck College, University of London, 1997)
right Courses offered range from the history of the Greek and Roman world to the 20th century, and cover Britain, Europe, North America, Africa, and the Far East.

Sometimes a long sentence can in itself throw off a writer's sense of subject-verb agreement, even if subject and verb are close together. In the following example the close proximity of the subject *simplifications* to the verb has not prevented error:

wrong The decline in the quality of leadership is mirrored in the crude simplifications which characterizes the average person's view of the world.
right The decline in the quality of leadership is mirrored in the crude simplifications which characterize the average person's view of the world.

(b) The error of using *there is* instead of *there are* when the subject is plural has become more and more frequent in writing as well as in speech. When these two expressions are used, remember that the subject comes after the verb; use *is* or *are* depending on whether the subject is singular or plural.

wrong There's many more opportunities of that sort than there used to be.
right There are many more opportunities of that sort than there used to be.

3. **habitual action**: The simple present tense is often used to express what is called *habitual* action—the way an action ordinarily, or habitually, occurs. The simple present tense is used to name such action even if the main verb of the sentence is in the past or future tense.

wrong The professor told us that Jupiter was the largest planet.
right The professor told us that Jupiter is the largest planet.
(Jupiter has not stopped being the largest since he spoke.)

The Present Progressive (or Continuous) Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I am saying	we are saying
2nd person	you are saying	you are saying
3rd person	he, she, it is saying	they are saying

4. **verbs not normally used in the continuous tenses**: In English the continuous tenses are not normally used with many verbs which have to do with feelings, emotions, or senses. Some of these verbs are *to see, to hear, to understand, to believe, to hope, to know, to think* (meaning *believe*), *to trust, to comprehend, to mean, to doubt, to suppose, to wish, to want, to love, to desire, to prefer, to dislike, to hate*.

wrong He is not understanding what I meant.
right He does not understand what I meant.

The Simple Past Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I finished	we finished
2nd person	you finished	you finished
3rd person	he, she, it finished	they finished

5. **irregular verbs**: The occasional problems that crop up with the simple past tense usually involve irregular verbs—that is to say, verbs that do not follow a regular pattern in the formation of the simple past and other tenses. (See page 32 for a fuller discussion and list.) The use of *may, might* is a good example:

wrong Bands such as U2 and Simple Minds gained a foothold in North America through campus radio; without it they may not have broken through.

right Bands such as U2 and Simple Minds gained a foothold in North America through campus radio; without it they might not have broken through.

6. **lie/lay**: Two other verbs that often cause problems with the simple past tense are *lie* and *lay*. The difficulty many people have in keeping these straight is often ascribed to other factors, but is in part also attributable simply to the forms of the tenses; the past tense of *lie* is the same as the present tense of *lay*. Also, the past participle of *lie* is *lain*, not *laid*.

informal Many in our party have just laid down and rolled over; they cannot get over the fact that we have lost control of the House of Representatives.

right Many in our party have just lain down and rolled over; they cannot get over the fact that we have lost control of the House of Representatives.

Given the inherent confusion of the tense forms, the difficulty of getting one's tongue round *lain down* rather than *laid down*, and the fact that almost anyone will know what meaning is intended with these words, many authorities now feel that the distinctions are not worth troubling over except in formal written English.

The Past Progressive (or Continuous) Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I was leaving	we were leaving
2nd person	you were leaving	you were leaving
3rd person	he, she, it was leaving	they were leaving

The problems that sometimes occur with the past continuous tense are the same as those that occur with the present continuous (see above, number 4). Remember to avoid these tenses when using verbs having to do with feelings, emotions, or senses (e.g. *see, hear, under-*

stand, believe, hope, know, think, trust, comprehend) and when using the verb *to have* to mean *own, possess*, or *suffer from*.

wrong At that time he was believing that everything on earth was created within one week.

right At that time he believed that everything on earth was created within one week.

The Simple Future Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I will arrive	we will arrive
2nd person	you will arrive	you will arrive
3rd person	he, she, it will arrive	they will arrive

The only significant difficulty in using the simple future tense occurs over the issue of when to use *shall*, which has for the most part given way to *will* in ordinary usage. But it will never disappear; most of us who would never dream of wading through the pages and pages many authorities offer on when to use *will* and when to use *shall* nevertheless sense instinctively moments when *shall* lends the resonance of added conviction to a verb.

milder We will not fail.

more determined We shall not fail.

The Future Progressive (or Continuous) Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I will be finding	we will be finding
2nd person	you will be finding	you will be finding
3rd person	he, she, it will be finding	they will be finding

The Perfect Tenses

As used to refer to the perfect tenses, the word *perfect* means *completed*; as you might expect, then, the perfect tenses are often (though not always) used to express actions that have been completed. They are formed by combining some form of the verb *to have* with a past participle (e.g., *opened, finished, believed, done*).

The Present Perfect Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I have worked	we have worked
2nd person	you have worked	you have worked
3rd person	he, she, it has worked	they have worked

7. **continuing past actions**: One way in which this tense is used is to speak of past actions which may continue into the present, or be repeated in the present or future. In the sentence, *Margaret Atwood has written a number of books*, for example, the form of the verb shows that she will probably write more; she has neither died nor given up writing.

A simple enough practice in normal usage, but in the long sentences often attempted as part of academic writing, it is easy to become confused:

wrong Since it called the First World Food Congress in 1963, the Food and Agriculture Organization has said clearly that the world, with the science and technology then known, had enough knowledge to ensure man's freedom from hunger. Successive world congresses and conferences have repeated this contention. (from a paper given by a distinguished professor at an academic conference)

Here the writer has evidently chosen the present perfect, thinking that he is referring to a situation which has continued on into the present. But when he refers to the *science and technology then known* and to *successive world congresses and conferences* he has cut off the 1963 conference from any grammatical connection with the present. This is again the sort of mistake that most writers can only catch during the revision process.

right When it called the First World Food Congress in 1963, the Food and Agriculture Organization said clearly that the world, with the science and technology then known, had enough knowledge to ensure man's freedom from hunger. Successive world congresses and conferences have repeated this contention.

The Past Perfect Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I had believed	we had believed
2nd person	you had believed	you had believed
3rd person	he, she, it had believed	they had believed

Since the verb remains unchanged in all these forms, the past perfect is one of the easiest tenses to remember. What is difficult is learning how and when to use it. In English, however, there are quite definite rules about when the past perfect tense should be used. Its chief use is

to show that one action in the past was completed before another action in the past began. Here are some examples:

- I told my parents what had happened.
  (The happening occurred before the telling.)
- By the time the group of tourists left Mozambique, they had formed a very favourable impression of the country.
  (The forming occurred before the leaving.)
- When he had gone I thought very seriously about what he had said.
  (Both the going and the saying occurred before the thinking.)

The usefulness of the past perfect tense can be clearly seen in passages in which the writer wishes to flashback, or move backwards in time. If you compare the following passages, you will see that the use of the past perfect tense in the second passage removes any confusion about the order in which the events happened. In the example below, when only the simple past tense is used, it sounds as if the dead snake is able to crawl:

wrong The tail was still moving, but the snake itself was quite dead. It crawled out from under a rock and slowly moved towards me as I was lowering the canoe at the end of the portage.

right The tail was still moving, but the snake itself was quite dead. It had crawled out from under a rock and had moved slowly towards me as I had been lowering the canoe at the end of the portage.
(In the second passage it is clear that the snake approached this person before it died, and not afterwards.)

Perhaps the most common occasions in which we use the past perfect tense are when we are using indirect speech:

- She said that she had knocked on my door in the morning, but that there had been no answer.
  (The knocking happened before the saying.)
- The Chair of the Committee repeatedly asked the witness when the President had known of the diversion of funds.
  (The knowing happened before the asking.)

In a few cases it is possible to speak correctly of two actions which happened one after the other in the past by using the simple past tense for both actions. The use of the word *after*, for example, often makes it clear that the first action was completed before the other began.

8. **past actions at different times, or over a prolonged period**: Writers often neglect to use the past perfect to name the earlier action

when they are speaking of two (or more) actions that happened at different times in the past.

wrong He asked me if I talked to his secretary before coming to him.

right He asked me if I had talked to his secretary before coming to him.

wrong By the time the Allies decided to resist Hitler, the Nazis built up a huge military machine.

right By the time the Allies decided to resist Hitler, the Nazis had built up a huge military machine.

wrong Johnson's girlfriend, Marsha Dianne Blaylock, said she knew Williams since October 2001, when she and Johnson began their relationship.

right Johnson's girlfriend, Marsha Dianne Blaylock, said she had known Williams since October 2001, when she and Johnson began their relationship.

(Note that like the present perfect, the past perfect is very frequently required with *since* or *for*.)

The past perfect is also used to indicate that a past action occurred over a prolonged period:

- In the early 1960s Sonny Bono was a disheveled pop singer and songwriter with hippie tendencies; by the time of his death in 1998 he had become a conservative Republican member of the House of Representatives.

wrong In 1980, 10 per cent of Chile's families did not have sufficient income to satisfy the minimum food requirements recommended by international organizations; in 2000 the figure grew to 32 per cent.

right In 1980, 10 per cent of Chile's families did not have sufficient income to satisfy the minimum food requirements recommended by international organizations; by 2000 the figure had grown to 32 per cent.

right ... in 2000 the figure was 32 per cent.

(The original suggests that the figure had remained at 10 per cent in every year from 1980 to 2000, and then jumped in the course of one year to 32 per cent.)

The Future Perfect Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I will have gone	we will have gone
2nd person	you will have gone	you will have gone
3rd person	he, she, it will have gone	they will have gone

The Conditional

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I would go	we would go
2nd person	you would go	you would go
3rd person	he, she, it would go	they would go

The conditional tense is used when we are speaking of actions which would happen *if* certain conditions were fulfilled. Here are some examples:

- If I wanted to go to Australia, I would have to fly.
- If I drank a lot of gin, I would be very sick.
- I would lend Joe the money he wants if I trusted him.

Notice that each of these sentences is made up of a main clause, in which the conditional tense *would have, would be*, etc., is used, and a subordinate clause beginning with *if*, with a verb in the simple past tense (*wanted, drank, trusted*, etc.). In all cases the action named in the *if* clause is considered by the speaker to be unlikely to happen, or quite impossible. The speaker does not really want to go to Australia: she is just speculating about what she would have to do if she did. Similarly the second speaker does not expect to drink a lot of gin: if he did, he would be sick, but he does not plan to. In the same way, the speaker of the third sentence does not trust Joe: he is speaking about what the situation would be if he did trust Joe. Situations like these which are not happening and which we do not expect to happen are called *hypothetical situations*: we speculate on what would happen *if* ... but we do not expect the *if* ... to come true.

If we think the *if* ... is likely to come true, then we use the future tense instead of the conditional in the main clause, and the present tense in the subordinate *if* clause, as in these examples:

- If I drink a lot of gin, I will be very sick.
  (Here the speaker thinks that it is very possible or likely that he will drink a lot of gin.)
- If I want to go to Australia, I will have to fly.
  (Here the speaker thinks that she may really want to go.)

Notice the difference between the following two sentences:

- If a socialist government is elected in Brazil, the American administration will not be pleased.
  (Here the writer thinks that it is quite possible or likely that the socialists will be elected.)

- If a socialist government were elected in Brazil, the American administration would not be pleased.
  (Here the writer is assuming that the socialists probably will not be elected.)

9. **the subjunctive**: Notice in the above example that *were* is used instead of *was*. This is what is known as the subjunctive mood, used in certain cases to denote actions that are wished for or imagined. Years ago there were many more types of sentences in which the subjunctive was used than there are now, but it has by no means disappeared.

- If we can't even get this much done, God help us.
  (not *God helps us*)
- If I were you, I'd do what she says.
  (not *if I was you*)
- Suffice it to say that the subject is a controversial one.
  (not *suffices it* ...)
- Be that as it may, the central assertion of Smith's book is irrefutable.
  (not *is that* ...)
- The doctor advises that he stop smoking immediately.
  (not *that he stops*)

wrong If a bank was willing to lend new businesses very large amounts without proper guarantees, it would go bankrupt very quickly.

right If a bank were willing to lend new businesses very large amounts without proper guarantees, it would go bankrupt very quickly.

10. **the conditional tense in the main clauses**: Some writers mistakenly use the conditional tense or the present tense (instead of the past tense) in the *if* clause when they are using the conditional tense in the main clause.

wrong If I want to buy a car, I would look carefully at all the models available.

right If I wanted to buy a car, I would look carefully at all the models available.
(The speaker does not want to buy a car.)

or If I want to buy a car, I will look carefully at all the models available.
(The speaker may really want to buy a car.)

wrong If television networks would produce fewer series about violent crime, parents would allow their children to watch even more television than they do now.

right If television networks produced fewer series about violent crime, parents would allow their children to watch even more television than they do now.

Remember that the past tense (or with the verb *to be*, the subjunctive) is used in the *if* clause whenever the conditional tense is being used in the main clause.

The Past Conditional Tense

	singular	*plural*
1st person	I would have gone	we would have gone
2nd person	you would have gone	you would have gone
3rd person	he, she, it would have gone	they would have gone

This tense is used in conditional sentences in which we are speaking of actions which never happened. It is used in the main clause, with the past perfect tense being used in the *if* clause.

- If I had studied harder, I would have passed.
  (meaning that in fact I did not study very hard, and did not pass)
- If Kitchener had arrived at Khartoum a day earlier, he would have saved Gordon and the rest of the British garrison force.
  (meaning that Kitchener did not come early enough, and was not able to prevent the 1885 massacre at Khartoum)

11. **limiting it to the main clause**: Some people mistakenly use the past conditional tense in both clauses of sentences such as these; remember that the past conditional should be used only in the main clause; use the past perfect in the *if* clause.

wrong If the Titanic would have carried more lifeboats, hundreds of lives would have been saved.

right If the Titanic had carried more lifeboats, hundreds of lives would have been saved.

wrong If the 'Yes' campaign in Quebec would have won 200,000 more votes, the course of Canadian politics in the mid-1990s would have been very different.

right If the 'Yes' campaign in Quebec had won 200,000 more votes, the course of Canadian politics in the mid-1990s would have been very different.

Active and Passive Voice

12. **reduce wordiness**: As many authorities have pointed out, in most

cases writers can make their sentences less wordy and more effective by using the active voice rather than the passive.

wrong	The election was lost by the premier. (Passive—7 words)
right	The premier lost the election. (Active—5 words)
wrong	Union power was seen by them to have constrained the possibilities for full investment, and for achieving full employment. (from the first draft of a manuscript by a professor)
right	The shareholders thought that union power had constrained the possibilities for full investment, and for achieving full employment.

The vice, one should note, is not the passive voice *per se*, but the wordiness it sometimes gives rise to.

Other Tenses

- *The present perfect continuous tense*—I have been running, you have been working, etc.
- *The past perfect continuous tense*—I had been looking, you had been following, etc.
- *The future perfect continuous tense*—I will have been sleeping, they will have been studying, etc.
- *The conditional continuous tense*—I would be bringing, she would be starting, etc.
- *The past conditional continuous tense*—I would have been working, he would have been driving, etc.

DANGLING CONSTRUCTIONS

Dangling Participles and Infinitives

A present participle is an *-ing* word (*going, thinking,* etc.). When combined with a form of the verb *to be*, participles form part of a complete verb. They can also be used in a number of ways on their own, however:

- The President felt that visiting China would be unwise at that time.
  (Here *visiting China* acts as a noun phrase.)
- Having taken into account the various reports, the Committee decided to delay the project for a year.
  (Here *having taken into account the various reports* acts as an adjectival phrase modifying the noun *Committee*.)

13. **dangling present participles or participial phrases**: The danger of dangling occurs with sentences such as the second example above. If the writer does not take care that the participial phrase refers to the subject of the main clause, some absurd sentences can result:

wrong	Waiting for a bus, a brick fell on my head. (Bricks do not normally wait for buses.)
right	While I was waiting for a bus, a brick fell on my head.
wrong	Leaving the room, the lights must be turned off. (Lights do not normally leave the room.)
right	When you leave the room you must turn off the lights.

In sentences such as these the amusing error is relatively easy to notice; it can be much more difficult with longer and more complex sentences. Experienced writers are especially alert to this pitfall if they begin a sentence with a participle or participial phrase that describes a mental operation; they are wary of beginning by *considering, believing, taking into account, remembering, turning for a moment,* or *regarding*.

wrong	Believing that he had done no wrong, the fact of being accused of dishonesty infuriated the company's CEO.
right	Believing that he had done no wrong, the company's CEO was infuriated at being accused of dishonesty.
or	The company's CEO was infuriated at being accused of dishonesty; he believed he had done no wrong.
wrong	Considering all the above-mentioned studies, the evidence shows conclusively that smoking can cause cancer.

right Considering all the above-mentioned studies, we conclude that smoking causes cancer.

better These studies show conclusively that smoking can cause cancer.

wrong Turning for a moment to the thorny question of Joyce's style, the stream of consciousness technique realistically depicts the workings of the human mind.

right Turning for a moment to the thorny question of Joyce's style, we may observe that his stream of consciousness technique realistically depicts the workings of the human mind.

better Joyce's style does not make *Ulysses* easy to read, but his stream of consciousness technique realistically depicts the workings of the human mind.

wrong Taking into account the uncertainty as to the initial temperature of the beaker, the results are not conclusive.

poor Taking into account the uncertainty as to the initial temperature of the beaker necessitates that the results be deemed inconclusive.

better Since the initial temperature of the beaker was not recorded, the results are inconclusive.

Notice that in each case the best way to eliminate the problem is to dispense with the participial phrase entirely. More often than not one's writing is improved by using active verbs rather than participial phrases. Many people seem to feel that writing which is filled with participial phrases somehow sounds more important; in fact, such phrases tend to obscure the writer's meaning under unnecessary padding. This is true even when the participles are not dangling:

wrong Another significant characteristic having a significant impact on animal populations is the extreme diurnal temperature range on the desert surface.

(Can a characteristic have an impact? A small point is here buried in a morass of meaningless abstraction.)

better The extreme diurnal temperature range on the desert surface also affects animal populations.

wrong Referring generally to the social stratification systems of the city as a whole, we can see clearly that types of accommodation, varying throughout in accordance with income levels and other socio-economic factors, display an extraordinary diversity.

(Is there anything either clear or extraordinary about this?)

better In this city rich people and poor people live in different neighborhoods, and rich people live in larger houses than poor people.

By cutting out the padding in this way the writer may occasionally find to his surprise that instead of saying something rather weighty and important as he had thought he was doing, he is in fact saying little or nothing. But he should not be discouraged if this happens; the same is true for all writers. The best response is simply to chuckle and scratch out the sentence!

14. **dangling past participles** (e.g., *considered, developed, regarded*): The same sorts of problems that occur with present participles are frequent with past participles as well:

wrong Considered from a cost point of view, Combarp Capital Corporation could not really afford to purchase Skinflint Securities.
(Combarp is not being considered; the purchase is.)

poor Considered from the point of view of cost, the purchase of Skinflint Securities was not a wise move by Combarp Capital Corporation.

better Combarp Capital Corporation could not really afford to buy Skinflint Securities.

wrong Once regarded as daringly modern in its portrayal of fashionable *fin de siècle* decadence, Wilde draws on traditional patterns to create a powerful new Gothic tale. (*The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*)
(The novel is an 'it'; Oscar Wilde was a 'he.')

right *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was once regarded as daringly modern in its portrayal of fashionable *fin de siècle* decadence. In the novel Wilde draws on traditional patterns to create a powerful new Gothic tale.

wrong Used with frequency, a man will feel refreshed and rejuvenated. (aftershave advertisement)

right Used with frequency, this product will help a man feel refreshed and rejuvenated.

15. **dangling infinitive phrases**:

wrong To conclude this essay, the French Revolution was a product of many interacting causes.
(The French Revolution concluded no essays.)

poor To conclude this essay, let me say that the French Revolution was a product of many causes.

better The explanations given for the French Revolution, then, are not mutually exclusive; it was a product of many interacting causes.
(A good writer does not normally need to tell her readers that she

is concluding an essay; they can see the space at the bottom of the page. A little word such as *then*, set off by commas, is more than enough to signal that this is a summing-up.)

wrong To receive a complimentary copy, the business reply card should be returned before June 30.
(The card will not receive anything.)

right To receive a complimentary copy, you should return the business reply card before June 30.

wrong To appreciate the full significance of the Meech Lake Accord, a range of factors needs to be considered.
(A factor cannot appreciate.)

poor To appreciate the full significance of the Meech Lake Accord, we need to consider many things.

better The Meech Lake Accord was important in many ways.

16. **dangling gerund or prepositional phrases**:

wrong In reviewing the evidence, one point stands out plainly.
(A point cannot review evidence.)

poor In reviewing the evidence, we can see one point standing out plainly.

better One point stands out plainly from this evidence.

wrong When analyzing the figures, ways to achieve substantial savings can be discerned.
(The ways cannot analyze.)

poor When we analyze the figures we can see ways to achieve substantial savings.

better The figures suggest that we can greatly reduce our expenses.

Other sorts of phrases can be caught dangling too. But almost all writers are capable of attaching them properly if they re-read and revise their work carefully.

wrong On behalf of City Council and the people of Windsor, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our city. (from an announcement by the Mayor)
(The Mayor, not a faceless *it*, is acting on behalf of the others.)

right On behalf of City Council and the people of Windsor, I am pleased to welcome you to our city.

wrong By adding more component parts to the prototype, this would cause an increase in the price of the product.

right By adding more component parts to the prototype, we necessitate an increase in the price of the product.

or Adding more component parts to the prototype makes it necessary to increase the price of the product.

SEQUENCE OF TENSES

If the main verb of a sentence is in the past tense, other verbs must also express a past viewpoint (except when a general truth is being expressed). Some writers have trouble keeping the verb tenses they use in agreement, particularly when indirect speech is involved, or when a quotation is incorporated into a sentence.

17. **agreement of tenses in indirect speech—past plus subjunctive**:

wrong He said that he will fix the engine before the end of 2001.

right He said that he would fix the engine before the end of 2001.
(*He said that he will fix the engine* implies that the fixing has not yet occurred but may still occur.)

18. **agreement of tenses in indirect speech—past plus past perfect**:

wrong He claimed that he smoked drugs many years earlier, but that he never inhaled.

right He claimed that he had smoked drugs many years earlier, but that he had never inhaled.

19. **agreement of tenses—quoted material**:

wrong Prime Minister Blair admitted that "such a policy is not without its drawbacks."
(The past tense *admitted* and the present tense *is* do not agree.)

There are two ways of dealing with a difficulty such as this:

(a) Change the sentence so as to set off the quotation without using the connecting word *that*. Usually this can be done with a colon. In this case the tense you use does not have to agree with the tense used in the quotation. The words before the colon, though, must be able to act as a complete sentence in themselves.

(b) Use only that part of the quotation that can be used in agreement with the tense of the main verb.

right Prime Minister Blair did not claim perfection: "such a policy is not without its drawbacks," he admitted.

or Prime Minister Blair admitted that such a policy was "not without its drawbacks."

Here are some other examples:

wrong Churchill promised that "we shall fight on the beaches, ... we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

(This suggests that you, the writer, will be among those fighting.)

right Churchill made the following promise: "We shall fight on the beaches, ... we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

(Notice that the word *that* is now removed.)

or Churchill promised that the British people would "fight on the beaches, ... in the fields and in the streets, ... in the hills," and that they would "never surrender."

wrong In the 1974 election campaign the Liberals claimed that "the Land is strong."

right In the 1974 election campaign the Liberals slogan was "The Land is Strong."

or In the 1974 election campaign the Liberals asserted that the Land was strong.

IRREGULAR OR DIFFICULT VERBS

The majority of verbs in English follow a regular pattern—*I open* in the simple present tense, *I opened* in the simple past tense, *I have opened* in the present perfect tense, and so forth. However, most of the more frequently used verbs are in some way or another irregular. To pick an obvious example, we say *I went* instead of *I goed*, and *I have gone* instead of *I have goed*. What follows is a list of the main irregular or difficult verbs in English. The past participle (column 3) is used in tenses such as the present perfect (e.g., *I have grown, he has found*) and the past perfect (*I had grown, I had found*).

The verbs that most frequently cause problems are given special treatment in the following list:

(Note: In both regular and irregular verbs, the present tense is formed by using the infinitive without the preposition *to.*)

	Present & Infinitive	**Simple Past**	**Past Participle**
20.	arise	arose	arisen
wrong	A problem had arose even before the discussion began.		
right	A problem had arisen even before the discussion began.		
	awake	awoke/awaked (passive: *was awakened*)	awoken/awaked/woken
	be	was/were	been
21.	bear	bore	borne
wrong	It was heartbreaking for her to lose the child after having bore it for so long.		
right	It was heartbreaking for her to lose the child after having borne it for so long.		
22.	beat	beat	beaten
wrong	The Yankees were badly beat by the Blue Jays.		
right	The Yankees were badly beaten by the Blue Jays.		
	become	became	become

	Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle
23.	begin	began	begun

wrong He had already began treatment when I met him.
right He had already begun treatment when I met him.

bend	bent	bent
bite	bit	bitten
bleed	bled	bled
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
bring	brought	brought
build	built	built
burn	burned/burnt	burned/burnt

24.	burst	burst	burst

wrong The pipes bursted while we were on holiday.
right The pipes burst while we were on holiday.

buy	bought	bought
can	could	been able
catch	caught	caught

25.	choose	chose	chosen

wrong In 1949 Newfoundlanders choose to join Confederation.
right In 1949 Newfoundlanders chose to join Confederation.

cling	clung	clung
come	came	come
cost	cost	cost
dig	dug	dug
do	did	done

26.	dive	dived	dived

wrong He dove into the shallow water.
right He dived into the shallow water.

27.	drag	dragged	dragged

	Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle

wrong The newspapers drug up a lot of scandal about her.
right The newspapers dragged up a lot of scandal about her.

draw	drew	drawn
dream	dreamed/dreamt	dreamed/dreamt

28. drink — drank — drunk

wrong He has drank more than is good for him.
right He has drunk more than is good for him.

HABS SHOULD HAVE DRANK
A TOAST TO DISCIPLINE

(Headline, *The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 19, 1990)

SHORT ON EDUCATION

"Re Habs Should Have Drank A Toast To Discipline (Dec.19): Whoever wrote this headline should have went to school longer." *Simon Farrow, North Vancouver*

(Letters to the Editor, *The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 27,1990)

drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
feel	felt	felt
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found

29. fit — fitted or fit (US) — fitted

wrong That dress has fit her since she was married.
right That dress has fitted her since she was married.

flee	fled	fled

30. fling — flung — flung

	Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle

wrong George flinged his plate across the room.
right George flung his plate across the room.

	fly	flew	flown
31.	forbid	forbade	forbidden

wrong Yesterday he forbid us to climb the fence.
right Yesterday he forbade us to climb the fence.

32.	forecast	forecast	forecast

wrong The Weather Office has forecasted more rain.
right The Weather Office has forecast more rain.

forget	forgot	forgotten
forgive	forgave	forgiven
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	got
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
grind	ground	ground
(e.g., I have ground the coffee.)		
grow	grew	grown

33.	hang	hanged/hung	hanged/hung

Note: *Hanged* is used only when referring to a person being killed by hanging. Say *The criminal has been hanged*, but *We have hung the picture on the wall*.

wrong No one has been hung in Canada since 1962.
right No one has been hanged in Canada since 1962.

have	had	had
hear	heard	heard
hide	hid	hidden
hit	hit	hit
hold	held	held
hurt	hurt	hurt

	Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle
	keep	kept	kept
	kneel	knelt	knelt
	know	knew	known
34.	lay	laid	laid

Note: Although many authorities feel that the distinction is not worth troubling over in informal English, formal English still distinguishes between *lay* and *lie*; you *lay* something on a table, and a hen *lays* eggs, but you *lie* down to sleep. In other words, *lie* is an intransitive verb; it should not be followed by a direct object. *Lay*, by contrast, is transitive.

wrong That old thing has been laying around for years.
right That old thing has been lying around for years.

	lead	led	led
	lean	leaned/leant	leaned/leant
	leap	leaped/leapt	leaped/leapt
	learn	learned/learnt	learned/learnt
	leave	left	left
	lend	lent	lent
	let	let	let
35.	lie	lay	lain

wrong He asked if I would like to lay down and rest.
right He asked if I would like to lie down and rest.

See also above, number 34.

	light	lighted/lit	lighted/lit
	lose	lost	lost
	make	made	made
	may	might	
	mean	meant	meant
	meet	met	met
	must	had to	
	pay	paid	paid
36.	prove	proved	proven

	Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle

wrong We have proved the hypothesis to be correct.
right We have proven the hypothesis to be correct.

put	put	put
read	read	read

37. ride rode ridden

wrong The actor had never rode a horse before.
right The actor had never ridden a horse before.

38. ring rang rung

wrong I rung the bell three times, but no one answered.
right I rang the bell three times, but no one answered.

rise	rose	risen
run	ran	run
saw	sawed	sawed/sawn
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
seek	sought	sought
sell	sold	sold
sew	sewed	sewed/sewn
shake	shook	shaken
shall	should	

39. shine shone shone

wrong The moon shined almost as brightly as the sun.
right The moon shone almost as brightly as the sun.

shoot	shot	shot
show	showed	showed/shown

40. shrink shrank shrunk

wrong The Government's majority shrunk in the election.
right The Government's majority shrank in the election.

shut	shut	shut
sing	sang	sung

	Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle
41.	sink	sank	sunk

wrong The *Edmund Fitzgerald* sunk on Lake Superior.
right The *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank on Lake Superior.

sit	sat	sat
sleep	slept	slept
slide	slid	slid
smell	smelled/smelt	smelled/smelt
sow	sowed	sowed/sown
speak	spoke	spoken
speed	speeded/sped	speeded/sped
spell	spelled/spelt	spelled/spelt
spend	spent	spent
spill	spilled/spilt	spilled/spilt
spin	spun	spun
spit	spat	spat
split	split	split
spread	spread	spread

42.	spring	sprang	sprung

wrong The soldiers hurriedly sprung to their feet.
right The soldiers hurriedly sprang to their feet.

stand	stood	stood
steal	stole	stolen
stick	stuck	stuck
sting	stung	stung
strike	struck	struck
swear	swore	sworn
sweep	swept	swept

43.	stick	stuck	stuck
44.	swim	swam	swum

wrong Pictures were taken while the royal couple swum in what they thought was a private cove.

Present & infinitive	Simple past	Past participle

right Pictures were taken while the royal couple swam in what they had thought was a private cove.

swing	swung	swung
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
tear	tore	torn
tell	told	told
think	thought	thought
throw	threw	thrown
tread	trod	trodden/trod
understand	understood	understood
wake	waked/woke	waked/woken
wear	wore	worn
weep	wept	wept
win	won	won
wind	wound	wound
wring	wrung	wrung

e.g. She wrings out her clothes if they are wet.

write	wrote	written

INFINITIVES, GERUNDS, OBJECTS: "*TO BE* OR NOT *TO BE?*"

There are no rules in English to explain why some words must be followed by an infinitive *(to go, to do, to be,* etc.), while others must be followed by a gerund (*of going, in doing,* etc.), and still others by a direct object. Here are some of the words with which difficulties of this sort most often arise:

45. **accept** something (not accept to do something): It needs a direct object.

wrong The Committee accepted to try to improve the quality of the postal service.
right The Committee accepted the task of trying to improve the postal service.
or The Committee agreed to try to improve the postal service.

46. **accuse** someone of doing something (not to do)

wrong Klaus Barbie was accused to have killed thousands of innocent civilians in WW II.
right Klaus Barbie was accused of having killed thousands of innocent civilians in WW II.

47. **appreciate** something: When used to mean *be grateful*, this verb requires a direct object.

wrong I would appreciate if you could respond quickly.
right I would appreciate it if you could respond quickly.
or I would appreciate a quick response.
(The verb *appreciate* without an object means *increase in value*.)

48. **assist** in doing something (not to do)

wrong He assisted me to solve the problem.
right He assisted me in solving the problem.
or He helped me to solve the problem.

49. **capable** of doing something (not to do)

wrong He is capable to run 1500 metres in under four minutes.
right He is capable of running 1500 metres in under four minutes.
or He is able to run 1500 metres in under four minutes.

50. **confident** of doing something (not to do)

wrong She is confident to be able to finish the job before dusk.
right She is confident of being able to finish the job before dusk.
or She is confident that she will finish the job before dusk.

51. **consider** something or someone to be something *or* consider it something (not as something)

wrong According to a recent policy paper, the Party now considers a guaranteed annual income as a good idea.
right According to a recent policy paper, the Party now considers a guaranteed annual income to be a good idea.
or According to a recent policy paper, the Party now regards a guaranteed annual income as a good idea.

52. **discourage** someone from doing something (not to do)

wrong The new Immigration Act is intended to discourage anyone who wants to come to Canada to enter the country illegally.
right The new Immigration Act is intended to discourage anyone who wants to come to Canada from entering the country illegally.

53. **forbid** someone to do something (not from doing)

wrong The witnesses were forbidden from leaving the scene of the crime until the police had completed their preliminary investigation.
right The witnesses were forbidden to leave the scene of the crime until the police had completed their preliminary investigation.

54. **insist** on doing something *or* insist that something be done (but not insist to do)

wrong The customer has insisted to wait in the front office until she receives a refund.
right The customer has insisted on waiting in the front office until she receives a refund.

55. **intention**: Have an intention of doing something *but* someone's intention is/was to do something

wrong Hitler had no intention to keep his word.
right Hitler had no intention of keeping his word.

or Hitler did not intend to keep his word.
or Hitler's intention was to break the treaty.

56. **justified** in doing something (not to do something)

wrong He is not justified to make these allegations.
right He is not justified in making these allegations.

57. **look forward** to doing something (not to do something)

wrong I am looking forward to receive your reply.
right I am looking forward to receiving your reply.

58. **opposed** to doing something (not to do something)

wrong He was opposed to set up a dictatorship.
right He was opposed to setting up a dictatorship.
or He was opposed to the idea of setting up a dictatorship.

59. **organize** something (not to do something)

wrong We organized to meet at ten the next morning.
right We organized a meeting for ten the next morning.
or We arranged to meet at ten the next morning.

60. **persist** in doing something (not to do something)

wrong Despite international disapproval and the will of Congress, the Reagan administration persisted to help the rebels in Nicaragua.
right Despite international disapproval and the will of Congress, the Reagan administration persisted in helping the rebels in Nicaragua.

61. **plan** to do (not on doing)

wrong They planned on closing the factory in Windsor.
right They planned to close the factory in Windsor.

62. **prohibit** someone from doing something (not to do)

wrong Members of the public were prohibited to feed the animals.
right Members of the public were prohibited from feeding the animals.

63. **regarded** as (not regarded to be)

wrong He is commonly regarded to be one of Canada's best musicians.
right He is commonly regarded as one of Canada's best musicians.

64. **responsible** for doing (not to do)

wrong Mr. Dumphy is responsible to market the full line of the company's pharmaceutical products.
right Mr. Dumphy is responsible for marketing the full line of the company's pharmaceutical products.

65. **sacrifice** something (not to do): The use of *sacrifice* without a direct object may have crept into the language through the use of the verb as a baseball term *(Martinez sacrificed in the ninth to bring home Womack)*.

wrong He sacrificed to work in an isolated community with no electricity or running water.
right He sacrificed himself to work in an isolated community with no electricity or running water.
or He sacrificed a good deal; the isolated community he now works in has no electricity or running water.

66. **seem** to be (not as if)

wrong The patient seemed as if he was in shock.
right The patient seemed to be in shock.
Exception: When the subject is *it*, *seem* can be followed by *as.* (e.g., It seemed as if he was sick, so we called the doctor.)

67. **suspect** someone of doing something (not to do)

wrong His wife suspected him to have committed adultery.
right His wife suspected him of committing adultery.
or His wife suspected that he had committed adultery.

68. **tendency** to do something (not of doing)

wrong Some Buick engines have a tendency of over-revving.
right Some Buick engines have a tendency to over-rev.
or The engine has a habit of over-revving.

PREPOSITION PROBLEMS: "UP WITH WHICH I WILL NOT PUT"

The prepositions used in English often make little or no sense. What good reason is there for saying *inferior to* but *worse than*? None whatsoever, but over the centuries certain prepositions have come to be accepted as going together with certain verbs, nouns, etc. There are no rules to help one learn the combinations; here are some of the ones that most commonly cause difficulty:

69. **agree** with someone, with what someone says; agree to do something, to something; agree on a plan, proposal, etc.

wrong	The union representatives did not agree with the proposed wage increase.
right	The union representatives did not agree to the proposed wage increase.
or	The union representatives did not agree with management about the proposed wage increase.

70. **angry** with someone; angry at or about something

wrong	He was angry at me for failing to keep our appointment.
right	He was angry with me for failing to keep our appointment.

71. **annoyed** with someone; annoyed by something

wrong	The professor is often annoyed with the attitude of the class.
right	The professor is often annoyed by the attitude of the class.
or	The professor is often annoyed with the class.

72. **appeal** to someone for something

wrong	The Premier appealed for the residents to help.
right	The Premier appealed to the residents for help.

73. **argue** with someone about something

wrong	They argued against each other for half an hour.
right	They argued with each other about the merit of exams.

74. **arrive** in a place, at a place (not arrive a place, except arrive home). Airlines are perhaps to blame for the error of using both *arrive* and *depart* without prepositions.

wrong He won't join the Yankees until tomorrow night when they arrive Milwaukee.
right He won't join the Yankees until tomorrow night when they arrive in Milwaukee.

75. **attach** two or more things (not attach together)

wrong The Siamese twins were attached together at the hip.
right The Siamese twins were attached at the hip.

76. **borrow** something from someone

wrong I borrowed him a pair of trousers.
right I borrowed a pair of trousers from him.

77. **cancel** something (not cancel out, except when the verb is used to mean *counterbalance* or *neutralize*)

wrong She cancelled out all her appointments.
right She cancelled all her appointments.
or After playing hockey, he ate a huge snack that cancelled out the calorie loss of the exercise.

78. **care** about something (meaning *to think it worthwhile or important to you*)

wrong George does not care for what happens to his sister.
right George does not care what happens to his sister.
or George does not care about what happens to his sister.

79. **centre**: centred on something (not around something; for one thing to be centred around another is physically impossible)

wrong The novel is centred around the conflict between British imperialism and Native aspirations.
right The novel centres on the conflict between British imperialism and Native aspirations.

80. **chase** someone or something away for doing something; despite the way the word is misused in baseball slang, the verb *chase* with no preposition means *run after*, not *send away*.

wrong Starting pitcher Pedro Martinez was chased in the fifth inning.
right Starting pitcher Pedro Martinez was pulled from the game in the fifth inning.

81. **collide** with something (not against something)

wrong The bus left the road and collided against a tree.
right The bus left the road and collided with a tree.

82. **compare** to, compare with: To compare something to something else is to liken it, especially when speaking metaphorically (e.g., *Can I compare thee to a summer's day?*). To compare something with something else is to judge how the two are similar or different (*If you compare one brand with another you will notice little difference*.). Use *compare with* when noting differences.

wrong The First World War was a small conflict compared to the Second World War, but it changed humanity even more profoundly.
right The First World War was a small conflict compared with the Second World War, but it changed humanity even more profoundly.

83. **concerned** with something (meaning *having some connection with it, having something to do with it*) and concerned about something (meaning *being interested in it or worried about it*)

wrong The Ministry is very concerned with the level of pollution in this river.
right The Ministry is very concerned about the level of pollution in this river.

84. **conform** to (not with)

wrong The building does not conform with current standards.
right The building does not conform to current standards.
or The contractors did not comply with current standards.

85. **congratulate** someone on something (not for)

wrong The Opposition leaders congratulated the Prime Minister for his success.
right The Opposition leaders congratulated the Prime Minister on his success.

86. **connect** two things, connect one thing with another (not connect up with)

wrong As soon as he connects up these wires, the system should work.
right As soon as he connects these wires, the system should work.

87. **conscious** of something (not that)

wrong He was not conscious that he had done anything wrong.
right He was not conscious of having done anything wrong.
(Note: Unlike *conscious*, *aware* can be used with *of* or with a *that* clause.)

88. **consist** in versus consist of: *Consist in* means *to exist in, to have as the essential feature*; *consist of* means *to be made up of.*

wrong Success consists of hard work.
(i.e. The essence of success is hard work.)
right Success consists in hard work.
wrong The U.S. Congress consists in two houses—the House of Representatives and the Senate.
right The U.S. Congress consists of two houses—the House of Representatives and the Senate.

89. **consult** someone (not consult with someone)

wrong She will have to consult with the Board of Directors before giving us an answer.
right She will have to consult the Board of Directors before giving us an answer.
or She will have to talk to the Board of Directors before giving us an answer.

90. **continue** something, with something, to a place (not continue on)

wrong We were told to continue on with our work.
right We were told to continue with our work.

91. **convenient** for someone, for a purpose; convenient to a place

wrong This house is very convenient to me; it is only a short walk to work.
right This house is very convenient for me; it is only a short walk to work.

92. **cooperate** with someone (not cooperate together)

wrong The Provinces should cooperate together to break down inter-provincial trade barriers.
right The Provinces should cooperate with one another to break down inter-provincial trade barriers.

93. **correspond** to (be in agreement with); correspond with (exchange letters with)

wrong The fingerprints at the scene of the crime corresponded with those of the suspect.

right The fingerprints at the scene of the crime corresponded to those of the suspect.

94. **couple** of things, times, people, etc.

wrong The body had been partially hidden under a pier on Lake Union, a couple hundred feet from the Aurora Avenue Bridge.

right The body had been partially hidden under a pier on Lake Union, a couple of hundred feet from the Aurora Avenue Bridge.

or The body had been partially hidden under a pier on Lake Union, approximately two hundred feet from the Aurora Avenue Bridge.

(In formal writing it is best to use *two* rather than *a couple of*.)

95. **criticism** of something or somebody (not against)

wrong His criticisms against her were completely unfounded.

right His criticisms of her were completely unfounded.

96. **depart** from a place

wrong One woman was heard saying to a friend as they departed the SkyDome ...

right One woman was heard saying to a friend as they departed from the SkyDome ...

or One woman was heard saying to a friend as they left the SkyDome ...

97. **die** of a disease, of old age; die from injuries, wounds

wrong My grandfather died from cancer when he was only forty-two years old.

right My grandfather died of cancer when he was only forty-two years old.

98. **different** from, to, than. *Different to* and *different from* are both acceptable British usage; *different from* is the preferred form in Canada; *different than* is a common and entirely acceptable form in the United States.

US These results are different than those we obtained when we did the same experiment yesterday.
UK These results are different to those we obtained when we did the same experiment yesterday.
Canada These results are different from those we obtained when we did the same experiment yesterday.

99. **discuss** something (not discuss about something; no preposition is needed)

wrong They discussed about what to do to ease tensions in the Middle East.
right They discussed what to do to ease tensions in the Middle East.

100. **divide** something (no preposition necessary)

wrong Lear wants to divide up his kingdom among his three daughters.
right Lear wants to divide his kingdom among his three daughters.

101. **do** something for someone (meaning something that will help); do something to someone (meaning something that will hurt)

wrong Norman Bethune did a lot to the people of China.
right Norman Bethune did a lot for the people of China.

102. **end**: at the end of something; in the end (no additional preposition). *In the end* is used when the writer does not say which end he means, but leaves this to be understood by the reader. *At the end of* is used when the writer mentions the end he is referring to.

wrong In the end of *Things Fall Apart*, we both admire and pity Okonkwo.
right At the end of *Things Fall Apart*, we both admire and pity Okonkwo.
or In the end, we both admire and pity Okonkwo.

103. **end** at a place (not end up at)

wrong We do not want to end up at the same place we started from.
right We do not want to end at the same place we started from.

104. **fight** someone or with someone (not against; *fight* means *struggle against*, so to add *against* is redundant)

wrong They fought against each other for almost an hour.
right They fought with each other for almost an hour.
or They fought each other for almost an hour.

105. **frightened** by something (when it has just frightened you); frightened of something (when talking about a constant condition)

wrong He was suddenly frightened of the sound of a door slamming.
right He was suddenly frightened by the sound of a door slamming.

106. **graduate** from a school

wrong He graduated McGill in 2002.
right He graduated from McGill in 2002.

107. **help doing**, as in *be unable to refrain from doing* (not help from doing)

wrong She could not help from agreeing to his suggestion.
right She could not help agreeing to his suggestion.

108. **hurry** (not hurry up)

wrong She told me to hurry up if I didn't want to miss the train.
right She told me to hurry if I didn't want to miss the train.

109. **identical** with (not to)

wrong This hotel is identical to the Holiday Inn we stayed in last week.
right This hotel is identical with the Holiday Inn we stayed in last week.

110. **in**: Do not use *in* where *throughout* is meant; particularly when using such words as *whole* or *entire*, be careful to use *throughout*.

wrong Political repression is common in the whole world.
right Political repression is common throughout the world.

111. **independent** of something or someone (not from)

wrong I would like to live entirely independent from my parents.
right I would like to live entirely independent of my parents.

112. **inferior** to someone or something (not than)

wrong Most people think that margarine is inferior than butter.
right Most people think that margarine is inferior to butter.
(*Inferior* and *superior* are the only two comparative adjectives which are not followed by *than*.)

113. **inside** or **outside** something (not of something)

wrong Within thirty minutes a green scum had formed inside of the beaker.
right Within thirty minutes a green scum had formed inside the beaker.

114. **interested** in something, in doing something (not to)

wrong She is very interested to find out more about plant genetics.
right She is very interested in finding out more about plant genetics.

115. **investigate** something (not investigate about or into something)

wrong The police are investigating into the murder in Brandon last week.
right The police are investigating the murder in Brandon last week.

116. **join** someone (not join up with)

wrong Conrad Black joined up with his brother Montagu in making the proposal to buy the company.
right Conrad Black joined his brother Montagu in making the proposal to buy the company.

117. **jump** (not jump up)

wrong Unemployment has jumped up to record levels recently.
right Unemployment has jumped to record levels recently.

118. **lift** something (not lift up)

wrong I twisted my back as I was lifting up the box.
right I twisted my back as I was lifting the box.

119. **lower** something (not lower down something)

wrong They lowered the coffin down into the grave.
right They lowered the coffin into the grave.

120. **mercy**: have mercy on someone; show mercy to or towards someone

wrong We should all have mercy for anyone who is suffering.
right We should all have mercy on anyone who is suffering.

121. **meet/meet with**: *Meet with* in the sense of *attend a meeting with* is a recent addition to the language. If one is referring to a less formal or less prolonged encounter, however, there is no need for the preposition.

wrong Stanley finally met with Livingstone near the shores of Lake Victoria.
right Stanley finally met Livingstone near the shores of Lake Victoria.
(The meaning here is *came face to face with for the first time*.)

122. **near** something (not near to something)

wrong The village of Battle is very near to the place where the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066.
right The village of Battle is very near the place where the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066.

123. **object** to something (not against)

wrong Some people have objected against being required to wear a seat belt.
right Some people have objected to being required to wear a seat belt.

124. **off** something (not off of)

wrong The man stepped off of the platform into the path of the moving train.
right The man stepped off the platform into the path of the moving train.

125. **opposite**: When used as a noun, *opposite* is followed by *of*; when used as an adjective, it is followed by *to* or *from*, or by no preposition.

wrong His conclusion was the opposite to mine.
(Here, *opposite* is a noun.)
right His conclusion was the opposite of mine.

or His conclusion was opposite to mine.
(Here, *opposite* is an adjective.)

126. **partake** of something or **participate** in something

wrong They have refused to partake in a new round of talks on the subject of free trade.
right They have refused to participate in a new round of talks on the subject of free trade.
or They have refused to partake of a new round of talks on the subject of free trade.

127. **prefer** one thing or person to another (not more than another)

wrong They both prefer tennis more than squash.
right They both prefer tennis to squash.

128. **protest** something (not protest against). *To protest* means *to argue against*; the preposition is redundant.

wrong The demonstrators were protesting against the Government's decision to allow missile testing.
right The demonstrators were protesting the Government's decision to allow missile testing.

129. **refer** to something (not refer back to something)

wrong If you are confused, refer back to the diagram on page 24.
right If you are confused, refer to the diagram on page 24.

130. **regard**: With regard to something

wrong I am writing in regards to the balance owing on your account.
fair I am writing with regard to the balance owing on your account.
better I am writing about the balance owing on your account.

131. **rejoice** at something (not for something)

wrong He rejoiced for his good fortune when he won the lottery.
right He rejoiced at his good fortune when he won the lottery.

132. **repeat** something (not repeat again)

wrong If you miss an answer you must repeat the whole exercise again.
right If you miss an answer you must repeat the whole exercise.

133. **request** something *or* request that something be done (but not request for something unless one is using the noun—a request for something)

wrong He has requested for two more men to help him.
right He has requested two more men to help him.
or He has put in a request for two more men to help him.

134. **retroactive** to a date (not from)

wrong The tax changes are retroactive from July 1.
right The tax changes are retroactive to July 1.

135. **return** to a place (not return back)

wrong He wanted to return back to Edmonton as soon as possible.
right He wanted to return to Edmonton as soon as possible.

136. **seek** something or someone (not seek for something)

wrong She suggested that we seek for help from the police.
right She suggested that we seek help from the police.

137. **sight**: in sight (near enough to be seen); out of sight (too far away to be seen); on sight (immediately after being seen)

wrong The general ordered that deserters be shot in sight.
right The general ordered that deserters be shot on sight.

138. **speak** to someone (when one speaker is giving information to a listener); speak with someone (when the two are having a discussion)

wrong She spoke harshly with the secretary about his spelling mistakes.
right She spoke harshly to the secretary about his spelling mistakes.

139. **suffer** from something (not with)

wrong He told me that he was suffering with the flu.
right He told me that he was suffering from the flu.

140. **superior** to someone or something (not than someone or something)

wrong The advertisements claim that this detergent is superior than the others.

right The advertisements claim that this detergent is superior to the others.

141. **surprised** at or by something: *At* is used to suggest that the person is disappointed or scandalized; unless one wishes to suggest this, *by* is the appropriate preposition.

wrong I was surprised at the unexpected arrival of my sister.
right I was surprised by the unexpected arrival of my sister.

142. **type** of person or thing

wrong This type carburetor is no longer produced.
right This type of carburetor is no longer produced.

143. **underneath** something (not underneath of)

wrong When we looked underneath of the table, we found what we had been looking for.
right When we looked underneath the table, we found what we had been looking for.

144. **until** a time or an event (not up until)

wrong Up until 1967 the National Hockey League was made up of only six teams.
right Until 1967 the National Hockey League was made up of only six teams.

145. **warn** someone of a danger, against doing something (not about something or to do something)

wrong She warned me about the danger involved in the expedition.
right She warned me of the danger involved in the expedition.

146. **worry** about something (not at something or for something)

wrong He is always worried at what will happen if he loses his job.
right He is always worried about what will happen if he loses his job.

147. **prepositions in pairs or lists**: If a sentence includes two or more nouns or verbs that take different prepositions, make sure to include all the necessary words.

wrong The fire was widely reported in the newspapers and television.

right The fire was widely reported in the newspapers and on television.

148. **ending a sentence with a preposition**: Some authorities have argued that it is poor English to end a sentence with a preposition. The best answer to them is Winston Churchill's famous remark upon being accused of ending with a preposition: "This is the sort of pedantic nonsense up with which I will not put." Obviously such awkwardness as this can be avoided only by ending with a preposition. It is surely true that in many other cases ending sentences with prepositions is awkward. In practice, however, these are situations that we are already likely to avoid. The following dialogue (a version of which was passed on to me by Prof. A. Levey of the University of Calgary) provides in dramatic form another demonstration of the absurdity of strictures against ending with prepositions:

"Where do you come from?"
"From a place where we don't end sentences with prepositions."
"Let me rephrase. Where do you come from, you stupid pedant?"

SINGULAR & PLURAL DIFFICULTIES

149. **unusual plural nouns**: A number of nouns are unusual in the way that a plural is formed. Here is a list of some that frequently cause mistakes. The most troublesome—as well as a few pronouns that cause similar difficulties—are also given individual entries below:

appendix	appendices
attorney general	attorneys general
bacterium	bacteria
basis	bases
court martial	courts martial
crisis	crises
criterion	criteria
curriculum	curricula
datum	data
ellipsis	ellipses
emphasis	emphases
erratum	errata
father-in-law	fathers-in-law
focus	foci
governor general	governors general
index	indexes or indices
matrix	matrixes or matrices
medium	media
millennium	millennia
nucleus	nuclei
parenthesis	parentheses
referendum	referenda or referendums
runner-up	runners-up
stratum	strata
symposium	symposia
synthesis	syntheses
thesis	theses

150. **accommodation**: The plural form is not normally used.

wrong My family and my friend's family were both unable to find accommodations downtown.

right My family and my friend's family were both unable to find accommodation downtown.

151. **anyone/anybody/no one/none/nobody**: All are singular. It is

often necessary to spend a few moments puzzling over how to phrase one's ideas before one finds a way to get all the verbs and subjects to agree, and at the same time avoid awkwardness. Ironically, however, the correct solution may in this case not be the best one. (See Bias-Free Language, pp.191.)

not in agreement	Anyone may visit when they like.
in agreement	Anyone may visit when he or she likes.
in agreement	Anyone may visit at any time.
not in agreement	No one likes to leave a place that they have grown fond of.
in agreement	No one likes to leave a place that he or she has grown fond of.
in agreement	No one likes to leave a place that has fond memories attached to it.

152. **bacteria**: A plural word; the singular is *bacterium*.

wrong	There were many bacterias in the mouldy bread.
right	There were a lot of bacteria in the mouldy bread.

153. **behavior**: Although social scientists speak of *a behavior* or of *behaviors* in technical writing, in other disciplines and in conversational English the word is uncountable (i.e. it cannot form a plural or be used with the indefinite article). Say *types of behavior*, not *behaviors*.

wrong	He has a good behavior.
right	His behavior is good.
or	He behaves well.

154. **between/among**: It is often supposed that *between* should always be used for two, *among* for more than two. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* points out, however, "in all senses *between* has been, from its earliest appearance, extended to more than two." Perhaps the most important difference is that *between* suggests a relationship of things or people to each other as individuals, whereas *among* suggests a relationship that is collective and vague. Thus we say *the ball fell among the hollyhocks* where we are expressing the relationship of the ball to many flowers collectively, and where the precise location of the ball is unspecified. But we should not say, as we watch a baseball game, *the ball fell among the three fielders*; here we know the precise location of the ball and are expressing the relationship between it and the three individuals.

wrong The ball fell among the three fielders.
right The ball fell between the three fielders.

155. **both/all**: Use *both* to refer to two, and *all* to refer to more than two.

wrong Harris and Waluchow were the chief speakers in the debate yesterday. They all spoke very well.
right Harris and Waluchow were the chief speakers in the debate yesterday. They both spoke very well.

156. **brain**: One person can have only <u>one</u> brain. The use of the plural to refer to the brain of one person (e.g., He blew his brains out) is slang, and should not be used in formal written work.

wrong He used his brains to solve the problem.
right He used his brain to solve the problem.

157. **children**: Be careful when forming the possessive; the apostrophe should come before the *s*.

wrong All the childrens' toys had been put away.
right All the children's toys had been put away.

158. **confusion**: Uncountable—we do not normally speak of *a confusion* or of *confusions*.

wrong The misunderstanding about his time of arrival caused a confusion.
right The misunderstanding about his time of arrival caused confusion.

159. **criteria**: Plural; the singular is *criterion*.

wrong The chief criteria on which an essay should be judged is whether or not it communicates clearly.
right The chief criterion on which an essay should be judged is whether or not it communicates clearly.

160. **damage**: In its usual meaning, this noun has no plural, since it is uncountable. We speak of *damage*, <u>not</u> *a damage*, and of *a lot of damage*, <u>not</u> *many damages*. The word *damages* means money paid to cover the cost of any damage one has caused.

wrong The crash caused many damages to his car, but he was unhurt.

right The crash caused a lot of damage to his car, but he was unhurt.

161. **data**: Like *bacteria, media*, and *phenomena*, the noun *data* is plural. The singular form, which is rarely used, is *datum*.

wrong This data proves conclusively that the lake is badly polluted.
right These data prove conclusively that the lake is badly polluted.

162. **each/every/none**: All three are singular. The same problems experienced with *anyone* and *no one* (see above) are common here as well. Even experienced writers often have difficulty phrasing sentences involving these words so as to have the parts agree. (Ironically, however, the 'correct' solution may in this case not always be the best one. See Bias-Free Language.)

not in agreement Each person applying for the job must fill out this form before they will be granted an interview.
in agreement Each person applying for the job must fill out this form before he or she will be granted an interview.
in agreement Each person applying for the job must fill out this form before being granted an interview.

163. **each other/one another**: Use *each other* for two, *one another* for more than two.

wrong The three brothers always tell stories to each other before going to sleep.
right The three brothers always tell stories to one another before going to sleep.
wrong The two men had long since begun to get on one another's nerves. (Alan Moorehead, *The White Nile*)
right The two men had long since begun to get on each other's nerves.

164. **either/neither**: *Either* and *neither* are both singular. This can create considerable awkwardness in structuring sentences. (See also Bias-Free Language on this point.)

wrong Somehow, neither Sally nor Great Uncle Magnus were as tidy as they had been when they set out. (Margaret Mahy, *Ultra-Violet Catastrophe*)

Trying to correct the error here by simply changing *were* to *was*,

creates a new problem with the *they* in the second half of the sentence; a further change is also necessary.

right Somehow, neither Sally nor Great Uncle Magnus was as tidy as both had been when they set out.
wrong So far neither the Liberal rank and file nor the electorate seem satisfied with Jean Chretien's performance.
right So far neither the Liberal rank and file nor the electorate seems satisfied with Jean Chretien's performance.

165. **either/any**; **neither/none**: Use *either* and *neither* for two, *any* and *none* for more than two.

wrong Shirley has six sisters, but she hasn't seen either of them since Christmas.
right Shirley has six sisters, but she hasn't seen any of them since Christmas.

166. **government**: A singular noun.

wrong The government are intending to build a new terminal at this airport before 2007.
right The government is intending to build a new terminal at this airport before 2007.

167. **graffiti**: A plural noun; the singular form is *graffito*.

wrong Graffiti covers most of the subway cars in the city.
right Graffiti cover most of the subway cars in the city.

168. **media**: Plural; the singular is *medium*.

wrong The media usually assumes that the audience has a very short attention span.
right The media usually assume that the audience has a very short attention span.

169. **money**: Some people seem to think that *monies* has a more official ring to it than *money* when they are talking of business affairs, but there is no sound reason for using this plural form in good English.

wrong The Council has promised to provide some monies for this project.
right The Council has promised to provide some money for this project.

170. **news**: Despite the *s*, this is a singular collective noun. Make sure to use a singular verb with it.

wrong Today's news of troubles in the Middle East are very disturbing.
right Today's news of troubles in the Middle East is very disturbing.

171. **phenomena**: Plural; the singular is *phenomenon*.

wrong The great popularity of disco music was a short-lived phenomena.
right The great popularity of disco music was a short-lived phenomenon.

172. **police**: a plural noun. Be sure to use a plural verb with it.

wrong The police is investigating the case, and hope to make an arrest soon.
right The police are investigating the case, and hope to make an arrest soon.

173. **someone/somebody**: Both are singular. Be careful with sentences involving one of these pronouns and the pronoun *they*; getting the phrasing right is not always easy.

wrong Someone has forgotten to turn off the stove; they should be more careful.
fair Someone has forgotten to turn off the stove; he or she should be more careful.
or Some careless person has forgotten to turn off the stove.

PRONOUN PROBLEMS: WHO CARES ABOUT WHOM?

Those unfamiliar with the territory may wish to refer to the section on pronouns in the Reference Guide to Basic Grammar at the back of the book. Readers may also wish to refer to the discussion of *y'all* and *youse* in the Preface.

174. **extra pronoun**: It is easy to add an extra pronoun, particularly if the subject of the sentence is separated from the verb by a long adjectival clause.

wrong	The countries which Hitler wanted to conquer in the late 1930s they were too weak to resist him.
right	The countries which Hitler wanted to conquer in the late 1930s were too weak to resist him.
wrong	The line that is longest in a triangle it is called the hypotenuse.
right	The line that is longest in a triangle is called the hypotenuse.

175. **first person**: In formal writing it is customary to use *I* and *me* infrequently or not at all. The object of a formal piece of writing is normally to present an argument, and writers realize that they can best argue their case by presenting evidence rather than by stating that such and such is what they think. Thus many teachers advise their students always to avoid using the first person singular (*I* and *me*) in their writing.

This guideline should not be regarded as a firm and fast rule. George Orwell, often praised as the finest essayist of the last century, uses *I* and *me* frequently. As the following example illustrates, however, he employs the first person to guide the reader through his argument, not to make the points in the argument:

> If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think more clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers. I will come back to this presently, and I hope that by that time the meaning of what I have said will become clearer. ("Politics and the English Language")

Phrases such as *I think* and *I feel*, on the other hand, will not help you convince the reader of the strength of your main points.

wrong Many authorities assume inflation to be a cause of high interest rates, but I think that high interest rates are a cause of inflation. This essay will prove my argument through numerous examples.

right Many authorities assume inflation to be a cause of high interest rates; in fact, high interest rates are often a cause of inflation. Let us take the years 1978 to 1983 in the US as an example.

176. **I/me**: Perhaps as a result of slang use of *me* as a subject pronoun (*Me and him got together for a few beer last night*), the impression seems to have lodged in many minds that the distinction between *I* and *me* is one of degree of politeness or formality rather than one of subject and object.

wrong There is no disagreement between you and I.

right There is no disagreement between you and me.
(Both *you* and *I* are here objects of a preposition—*between*. "Between you and I" is no more correct than is "I threw the ball at he.")

177. **than**: Does *than* take a subject or an object pronoun? Purists argue that we should say *She's brighter than I* [*am*], and *He's louder than she* [*is*]—that the verb is always understood in such sentences, even when we do not say it or write it, and that the unspoken verb requires a subject. It's hard to argue, however, that the increasingly widespread use of object pronouns after *than* is either ugly or confusing.

less formal She always sleeps later than him.

more formal She always sleeps later than he [does].

178. **unreferenced or wrongly referenced pronoun**: Normally a pronoun must refer to a noun in the previous sentence or clause. In the following sentence, for example, the pronoun *she* clearly refers to the noun *Charity*, which is the subject of the first clause in the sentence:

e.g. Charity told Alfred that she would start work at nine.

Notice how confusing the sentence becomes, however, if there are two possible *shes* in the first part of the sentence:

e.g. Charity told Mavis that she would start work at nine.

Does this mean that Charity will start work at nine, or that Mavis will? From the sentence it is impossible to tell. In cases like this, where it is not absolutely clear whom or what a pronoun refers to, use the noun again instead:

clear Charity told Mavis that she (Charity) would start work at nine.

wrong My father and my brother visited me early this morning. He told me that something important had happened in Regina.

right My father and my brother visited me early this morning. Father told me that something important had happened in Regina.

In the following case the writer has gone astray by mentioning two things—one singular, one plural—and then matching only one of the two with a pronoun. In this instance the best remedy is to substitute a noun for the pronoun:

wrong Shields's characters are so exquisitely crafted and her plot so artfully conceived that it keeps the reader riveted until the final page.

right Shields's characters are so exquisitely crafted and her plot so artfully conceived that the book keeps the reader riveted until the final page.

Similar mistakes are often made in writing about a general class of people, such as police officers, or doctors, or football players. When writing in this way one can use either the third person singular (e.g., *A doctor helps patients. He ...*) or the third person plural (*Doctors help patients. They ...*). Mixing the two in such situations often leads people to write unreferenced pronouns.

wrong A herbalist knows a lot about herbs and other plants. They can often cure you by giving you medicine.

(Here the pronoun *they* is presumably meant to refer to the plural noun *herbalists*, but the writer has referred only to a herbalist.)

right A herbalist knows a lot about herbs and other plants. He can often cure you by giving you medicine.

or Herbalists know a lot about herbs and other plants. They can often cure you by giving you medicine.

It may also not be clear what or whom a pronoun refers to if it is placed too far away from the noun:

wrong The Finance Minister increased corporation taxes by an average of 43 per cent. Other measures in the budget included $100 million in student assistance and a 2 per cent increase in sales taxes. He also introduced a variety of measures to help small businesses.

right The Finance Minister increased corporation taxes by an average of 43 per cent. Other measures in the budget included $100 million in student assistance and a 2 per cent increase in sales taxes. The Minister also introduced a variety of measures to help small businesses.

Be particularly careful when using *this* as a pronoun; if the preceding sentence is a long one, it may not be at all clear what *this* refers to:

wrong The deficit was forecast to be $200 million, but turned out to be over $2 billion. This reflected the government's failure to predict the increase in interest rates and the onset of a recession.
(This what?)

right The deficit was forecast to be $200 million, but turned out to be over $2 billion. This vast discrepancy reflected the government's failure to predict the increase in interest rates and the onset of a recession.

Sometimes the meaning may be clear, but the omission of a pronoun may create unintended and humorous ambiguity:

wrong She visited a doctor with a bad case of the flu.
(Did the doctor have the flu?)

right She visited a doctor when she had a bad case of the flu.

wrong The Cougar was a sporty car aimed at the youthful-feeling who wanted luxury in their automobiles. Its buyers were similar to Mustangs, but more affluent.

right The Cougar was a sporty car aimed at the youthful-feeling who wanted luxury in their automobiles. Its buyers were similar to those who bought Mustangs, but more affluent.

179. **who/whom**: The subject pronoun and the object pronoun, but of course it's not as simple as that. Nor is it—as those who don't feel it worth keeping *whom* around might have us believe—merely a matter of stuffiness or pedantry on the part of linguistic purists. Sound has a great deal to do with it. Even purists must sometimes find themselves saying, *I didn't know who I was talking to*, even though the rules say it should be *whom* (subject—I; object—whom). In similar fashion the

enemies of *whom* must surely be tempted to sacrifice principle rather than attempt such an owlish mouthful as T*o who was he talking?* They would do so not on the grammatical grounds of *whom*, the object pronoun, being correct since it is acting as the object of the preposition *to*, but on the grounds of *whom*, the word with an *m* on the end, being in that sentence a lot easier to say. In such circumstances convenience of pronunciation occasionally overrides arguments either for or against formality.

less formal	Scott Fitzgerald never cared who he irritated.
more formal	Scott Fitzgerald never cared whom he irritated.

PART OF SPEECH CONVERSIONS: A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE?

A well-known Calvin and Hobbes cartoon strip nicely conveys the amusement that part of speech conversions may engender:

> *Calvin*: "I like to verb words."
> *Hobbes*: "What?"
> *Calvin*: "I take nouns and adjectives and use them as verbs. Remember when "access" was a thing? Now it's something you do. It got verbed....Verbing weirds language."
> *Hobbes*: "Maybe we can eventually make language a complete impediment to understanding."

In fact, however, there is no good reason why a word that has become established as one part of speech should not be used as another; the language has always been changing and growing in this way. As Tom Shippey asks:

> What can be the matter with using nouns as adjectives? Everyone does it; how about "stone wall?" It has been built into the language since before English settlers found Ireland, let alone America.... As for converting nouns to verbs, what about "water?" "Watering the horses" is recorded from before the Conquest. (*Times Literary Supplement*, October 19–25, 1990)

For that matter, what about *chair, table, paper, shelf, bottle, cup, knife, fork, eye, mouth, finger*? The list of nouns that have also become verbs is a very long one, and it includes many of the most basic nouns in the language. The point in being aware of the conversion of one part of speech to another, then, is not that the practice is always a bad one. Rather it is to keep oneself aware of whether or not one is saying something in the best possible way. If the new creation fills a need, saying something more clearly and concisely than it is possible to do otherwise, then it deserves to survive. But if it fulfils no useful purpose—if clearer and more concise ways of saying the same thing already exist—then it's better to avoid it.

180. **access**: Except in the vocabulary of computers, *access* is probably best kept as a noun, not a verb; alternatives such as *enter* and *reach* are usually more precise.

worth checking	The cafeteria may be accessed from either the warehouse or the accounts department.

better	The cafeteria may be reached through the warehouse or the accounts department.

181. **adjective for adverb**: If a word is modifying a verb, it should as a general rule be an adverb rather than an adjective. This is normally the case when the descriptive word comes directly after the verb. We say, *The boy laughed quietly*, for example (rather than *The boy laughed quiet*), because the descriptive word *quietly* refers to the verb *laughed*, not the noun *boy*. Similarly, in the sentence *The quiet boy laughed* we use the adjective *quiet* to refer to the noun *boy*. The verb *to be*, however, which of course does not name an action in the way that other verbs do, is normally followed by adjectives rather than adverbs. (Verbs such as *taste, smell,* and *feel* resemble *be* in this respect.) Thus we say *The boy is quiet,* not *The boy is quietly*; we use the adjective rather than the adverb because we are again describing the boy, not the action of being. Very few would make the mistake of saying *He laughed quiet,* but almost everyone occasionally chooses an adjective where the adverb should be used.

wrong	I did good on the test yesterday.
right	I did well on the test yesterday.
wrong	She asked us not to talk so loud.
right	She asked us not to talk so loudly.
wrong	The premiers thought it should be worded different.
right	The premiers thought it should be worded differently.
wrong	According to Mr. Adams, "most books will go heavier into evolution, which is a good thing,"
right	According to Mr. Adams, "most books will go more heavily into evolution, which is a good thing."
wrong	He performs bad whenever he is under pressure.
right	He performs badly whenever he is under pressure.

The pragmatists may have a point when it comes to the propriety of using comparative adjectives such as *easier* in place of more long winded adverbs such as *more easily*. Should the *Financial Post* editor have corrected the headline that read "Northern Miners Breathe Easier"? Certainly it's easier to use the adjective here in place of the two-part adverb, *more easily*. Whether or not it's better is less clear; certainly many purists are not pleased by the practice.

less formal	The purpose of desktop publishing is to do the same old thing cheaper, easier, and quicker.
more formal	The purpose of desktop publishing is to do the same old thing more cheaply, more easily, and more quickly.

182. **advice/advise**: *Advice* is the noun, *advise* is the verb.

wrong They refused to take our advise.
right They refused to take our advice.

183. **affect/effect**: *Effect* is normally used as a noun meaning *result*. (It can also be used as a verb meaning *put into effect*, as in *The changes were effected by the Committee.*) *Affect* is a verb meaning *cause a result*.

wrong When the acid is added to the solution, there is no visible affect.
right When the acid is added to the solution, there is no visible effect.
wrong "The issues that effect us here on the reserve are the same issues that effect the whole constituency," Mr. Littlechild said. (*The Globe and Mail*)
right "The issues that affect us here on the reserve are the same issues that affect the whole constituency," Mr. Littlechild said.

184. **author**: A noun, not a verb; there is no need to find a substitute for *write*.

wrong Smith is a member of the Appeals Court, and has authored two books on the judicial system.
right Smith is a member of the Appeals Court, and has written two books on the judicial system.

185. **breath/breathe**: *Breath* is the noun, *breathe* the verb.

wrong When you breath, your lungs take in oxygen.
right When you breathe, your lungs take in oxygen.

186. **dependent/dependant**: *Dependent* is the adjective, *dependant* the noun. You are dependent on someone or something, and your young children are your dependants; they are dependent on you.

wrong Emily is still dependant on her parents for financial support.
right Emily is still dependent on her parents for financial support.

187. **dialogue**: As a verb, *talk* serves perfectly well, even after all these years.

awkward The two department heads should dialogue with each other more frequently.
better The two department heads should talk to each other more frequently.

188. **enthuse/enthusiastic**: *Enthuse* is the verb; *enthused* is its past participle. The adjective is *enthusiastic*.

wrong In 2002 millions were enthused about South Korea's World Cup performance.
right In 2002 millions were enthusiastic about South Korea's World Cup performance.
or In 2002 millions enthused over South Korea's World Cup performance.

189. **first/firstly**: *Firstly* is now generally thought of as archaic, though it is not incorrect. Be sure to be consistent, though, in the use of *first, second*, etc., in lists.

wrong There were several reasons for France's reluctance to commit more resources to the New World. First, she was consumed with the battle for supremacy in Europe. Secondly, the returns on previous investments had been minimal.
right There were several reasons for France's reluctance to commit more resources to the New World. First, she was consumed with the battle for supremacy in Europe. Second, the returns on previous investments had been minimal.

190. **good/well**: The most common of the adjective-for-adverb mistakes.

wrong As the manager put it, "He pitched good, but not real good."
fair He pitched well, but not really well.
better He did not pitch very well.

191. **impact**: The use of *impact* as a verb has become widespread even in formal English, but *affect* remains an attractive option.

awkward The government's decision will impact upon wholesalers in all areas of the country.
better The government's decision will affect wholesalers in all areas of the country.

192. **like/as**: *Like* is a preposition, not a conjunction; it introduces a noun or pronoun in a phrase. If introducing a clause, which always includes a verb, use *as* in formal writing.

e.g. He looks like his father.
(*Like* introduces the noun *father*.)
He looks as his father did at his age.
(*As* introduces the clause *as his father did at his age*.)

He is acting like a drunkard.
(*Like* introduces the noun *drunkard*.)
He is acting as if he were drunk.
(*As* introduces the clause *as if he were drunk*.)

wrong Like I said before, smoking is forbidden.
right As I said before, smoking is forbidden.
wrong He runs like I do—with short, choppy strides.
right He runs as I do—with short, choppy strides.
or He runs like me. We both take short, choppy strides.
wrong Baby Doc ran Haiti like his father had done.
right Baby Doc ran Haiti the way his father had.

The attempt is also sometimes made to use *like what* in place of *as.*

wrong Bush wanted to appear tough, like what Reagan did when he ordered the invasion of Grenada.
right Bush wanted to appear tough, as Reagan did when he ordered the invasion of Grenada.

193. **its/it's**: *Its* is an adjective meaning *belonging to it. It's* is a contraction of *it is*—a pronoun plus a verb. (Similarly, *whose* is an adjective meaning *belonging to whom*, whereas *who's* is a contraction of *who is*.)

wrong Its important to remember that the population of North America in this period was less than 10 million.
right It's important to remember that the population of North America in this period was less than 10 million.
wrong A coniferous tree continually sheds it's leaves.
right A coniferous tree continually sheds its leaves.

194. **lend/loan**: In formal English *loan* should be used only as a noun; *lend* is the verb.

wrong He was unwilling to loan his sister any money.
right He was unwilling to lend his sister any money.

195. **loath/loathe**: *Loath* is the adjective; *loathe* is the verb.

wrong He told me he is beginning to loath his job.
right He told me he is beginning to loathe his job.
or He is loath to return to his old job.

196. **loose/lose**: *Loose* is normally used as an adjective meaning *not tight*; as a verb it means *to make loose* (e.g., *He loosed the reins*). *Lose* is of course always a verb.

wrong As soon as it became dark she began to loose control of herself.
right As soon as it became dark she began to lose control of herself.
wrong If this movie doesn't bring the song back to the hit parade, then you know it's flopped—and that Spielberg is loosing his touch. (*The Toronto Star*)
right If this movie doesn't bring the song back to the hit parade, then you know it's flopped—and that Spielberg is losing his touch.

197. **maybe/may be**: *Maybe* is an adverb that should be replaced by *perhaps* in formal writing. *May be* is a compound verb.

wrong May be he will come, but I doubt it.
right Maybe he will come, but I doubt it.
or Perhaps he will come, but I doubt it.
wrong The prototype maybe ready by 2007.
right The prototype may be ready by 2007.

198. **meantime/meanwhile**: *Meantime* is a noun, used most frequently in the phrase *in the meantime. Meanwhile* is an adverb.

wrong The Germans were preparing for an attack near Calais. Meantime, the Allies were readying themselves for the invasion of Normandy.
right The Germans were preparing for an attack near Calais. Meanwhile, the Allies were readying themselves for the invasion of Normandy.

199. **practice/practise**: In Canada and Britain *practise* (verb) and *practice* (noun) should be distinguished; in the U.S. *practise* serves as both noun and verb.

US The team's first practise will be held on Thursday.
UK/CDA The team's first practice will be held on Thursday.

200. **predominate/predominant**: *Predominate* is the verb, *predominant* the adjective. (Either *predominately* or *predominantly* may be used as adverbs.)

wrong The Social Credit movement was predominate only in Alberta and British Columbia.
right The Social Credit movement was predominant only in Alberta and British Columbia.

or The Social Credit movement predominated only in Alberta and British Columbia.

201. **principal/principle**: *Principal* can be either a noun or an adjective. As a noun it means *the person in the highest position of authority in an organization* (e.g., a school *principal*) or *an amount of money*, as distinguished from the interest on it. As an adjective it means *first in rank or importance* (*The principal city of northern Nigeria is Kano*). *Principle* is always a noun, and is never used to describe a person; a *principle* is a *basic truth or doctrine*, a *code of conduct*, or a *law describing how something works*.

wrong We feel this is a matter of principal.
right We feel this is a matter of principle.
wrong Up went the shares of the two principle companies in this emerging field.
right Up went the shares of the two principal companies in this emerging field.

202. **prophecy/prophesy**: *Prophecy* is the noun, *prophesy* the verb.

wrong His comment should be regarded as a prediction, not a prophesy.
right His comment should be regarded as a prediction, not a prophecy.

203. **quality**: Although in colloquial English *quality* is frequently used as a replacement for *good* or *worthwhile*, in formal writing it should be used as a noun, not an adjective. It should also be remembered that something may as easily be of poor quality as of good quality.

wrong The salesman claims that this is a quality product.
right The salesman claims that this is a product of high quality.
or The salesman claims that this is a good product.
wrong "It was Mother's Day. I was trying to spend some quality time with my wife." (An NHL vice-president explaining why he had not attended an important playoff game, as quoted in *The Toronto Star*)
right "It was Mother's Day. I was trying to spend some time with my wife."

204. **quote/quotation**: In formal English *quote* is the verb, *quotation* the noun.

wrong The following quote shows just how determined she is to change the Constitution.

right The following quotation shows just how determined she is to change the Constitution.

205. **real/really**: One of the most commonly made adjective-for-adverb mistakes.

wrong Some of the fish we caught were real big.
fair Some of the fish we caught were really big.
better Some of the fish we caught were very big.

206. **verb-noun confusion**: Where verbs and nouns have similar forms, be careful not to confuse them. Some of the most common examples are: *advice* (noun) and *advise* (verb); *extent* (noun) and *extend* (verb); *device* (noun) and *devise* (verb); *revenge* (noun) and *avenge* (verb); *loan* (noun) and *lend* (verb).

wrong Gerald Ford, President from 1974 to 1976, has now to a large extend been forgotten.
right Gerald Ford, President from 1974 to 1976, has now to a large extent been forgotten.
wrong She wanted to revenge the harm he had caused her.
right She wanted to avenge the harm he had caused her.

207. **whose/who's**: *Whose* means *belonging to whom*; *who's* is a contraction of *who is.*

wrong Kennedy is not normally remembered as the President who's policies embroiled the US in the Vietnam conflict, but several scholars have suggested that he was as much responsible as was Johnson.
right Kennedy is not normally remembered as the President whose policies embroiled the US in the Vietnam conflict, but several scholars have suggested that he was as much responsible as was Johnson.

WORD MEANINGS: ARE CARS EVER STATIONERY?

208. **accept/except**: These two words are often confused because of their similar sounds. *Accept* is a verb meaning *to receive something favourably* (*or at least without complaining*). Examples:

- We accepted the invitation to his party.
- We will have to accept the decision of the judge.

Except, on the other hand, is a conjunction (or sometimes a preposition) which means *not including* or *but*.

wrong	All the permanent members of the Security Council accept China voted to authorize the use of force.
right	All the permanent members of the Security Council except China voted to authorize the use of force.

209. **adapt/adopt/adept**: To *adapt* something is *to alter or modify it*; to *adopt* something is *to approve it or accept responsibility for it*; *adept* is an adjective meaning *skilful*.

wrong	The Board adapted the resolution unanimously.
right	The Board adopted the resolution unanimously.

210. **adverse/averse**: *Adverse* means *unfavourable*; *averse* means *reluctant* or *unwilling*.

wrong	The plane was forced to land because of averse weather conditions.
right	The plane was forced to land because of adverse weather conditions.
right	The pilot was averse to the idea of landing in the fog.

211. **afflict/inflict**: A person *inflicts* pain or hardship on someone else, who is *afflicted* by the pain and hardship.

wrong	The Mugabe government began as early as 1983 to afflict terrible suffering on large numbers of Zimbabweans living in Matorbeleland.
right	The Mugabe government began as early as 1983 to inflict terrible suffering on large numbers of Zimbabweans living in Matorbeleland.

212. **aggravate/annoy/irritate**: *Aggravate* means *make worse*.

e.g. The injury was aggravated by the bumpy ride in the ambulance.

In formal English *aggravate* should not be used to mean *annoy* or *irritate*.

wrong She found his constant complaints very aggravating.
right She found his constant complaints very irritating.

213. **alliterate/illiterate**: *Alliterate* is a verb meaning *to use consecutively two or more words that begin with the same sound.*

e.g. The big, burly brute was frighteningly fat.

Illiterate is an adjective meaning either *unable to read* or *unable to read and write well*. Those who confuse the two are sometimes, if unfairly, accused of being illiterate.

wrong Over forty per cent of the population of Zambia is functionally alliterate.
right Over forty per cent of the population of Zambia is functionally illiterate.

214. **alternately/alternatively**: *Alternately* means *happening in turn, first one and then the other*; *alternatively* means *instead of.* Be careful as well with the adjectives *alternate* and *alternative*.

wrong An alternate method of arriving at this theoretical value would be to divide the difference between the two prices by the number of warrants.
right An alternative method of arriving at this theoretical value would be to divide the difference between the two prices by the number of warrants. (*or* "Another method of ... ")
wrong Professor Beit-Haliahmi seems to have trouble alternatively in reading his own book accurately and in reading my review of it correctly.
right Professor Beit-Haliahmi seems to have trouble alternately in reading his own book accurately and in reading my review of it correctly.

215. **ambiguity**: There are many types of ambiguity; for other references see the chapters on Pronoun Problems and Word Order, and the entries below for such words as *flammable*. Also see the adjacent box.

BRITISH LEFT WAFFLES ON FALKLAND ISLANDS

The following are all examples of ambiguity in newspaper headlines. In some cases it may take several moments to decipher the intended meaning.

TWO PEDESTRIANS STRUCK BY BRIDGE
MAN HELD OVER GIANT L.A. BRUSH FIRE
ILLEGAL ALIENS CUT IN HALF BY NEW LAW
PASSERBY INJURED BY POST OFFICE
RED TAPE HOLDS UP NEW BRIDGE
VILLAGE WATER HOLDS UP WELL
JERK INJURES NECK, WINS AWARD
BISHOP THANKS GOD FOR CALLING

(The above examples come courtesy of columnist Bob Swift of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, and Prof. A. Levey of the University of Calgary.)

Here are two gems passed on to me by editor Beth Humphries:

THE FOSSILS WERE FOUND BY SCIENTISTS EMBEDDED IN RED SANDSTONE.

SHE WALKED INTO THE BATHROOM TILED IN SEA-GREEN MARBLE.

And, from a Global News weather telecast, the following prediction:

"OUT WEST TOMORROW, THEY'RE GOING TO SEE THE SUN, AS WELL AS ATLANTIC CANADA."

216. **amiable/amicable**: *Amiable* is used to describe someone's personality; *amicable* describes the state of relations between people.

wrong Michibata said that the split with his former tennis partner had been an amiable one.

right Michibata said that the split with his former tennis partner had been an amicable one.

217. **amoral/immoral**: *Amoral* means *not based on moral standards*; *immoral* means *wrong according to moral standards*.

wrong The modern reader is unlikely to share Alexander Pope's views as to what constitutes amoral behavior.

right The modern reader is unlikely to share Alexander Pope's views as to what constitutes immoral behavior.

218. **anti/ante**: If you remember that *anti* means *against* and *ante* means *before* you are less likely to misspell the many words that have one or the other as a prefix.

wrong The UN had many anticedents—most notably the League of Nations formed after World War I.

right The UN had many antecedents—most notably the League of Nations formed after World War I.

219. **anxious/eager**: The adjective *anxious* means *uneasy, nervous, worried*; it should not be used in formal writing to mean *eager*.

wrong He was anxious to help in any way he could.

right He was eager to help in any way he could.

220. **appraise/apprise**: To *appraise* something is *to estimate its value*; to *apprise* someone of something is *to inform him or her of it*.

wrong The house has been apprised at $160,000.

right The house has been appraised at $160,000.

or He apprised her of the house's jump in value.

221. **assure/ensure/insure**: To *assure* someone of something is *to tell them with confidence or certainty*; to *insure* (or *ensure*) that something will happen is *to make sure* that it does; to *insure* something is *to purchase insurance* on it so as to protect yourself in case of loss.

wrong Our inventory is ensured for $10,000,000.

right Our inventory is insured for $10,000,000.

right I assure you that it will never happen again.

right I will ensure that it never happens again.

222. **attitude**: In colloquial English in recent years *attitude* has undergone a considerable transformation, becoming first a synonym for *bad attitude* and then a word more broadly denoting strength of character. In conversational English *She's got attitude* is more likely to be in-

tended as a compliment than a criticism. But in formal written English such colloquial usages should be used sparingly, if at all.

223. **be/become**: The difference between the two is that *to be* simply indicates existence, while *to become* indicates a process of change. Whenever you are talking about a change, use *become* instead of *be.*

wrong	I had been quite contented, but as time went by I was unhappy.
right	I had been quite contented, but as time went by I became unhappy.
wrong	After years of struggle, East Timor finally was independent in 2002.
right	After years of struggle, East Timor finally became independent in 2002.

224. **beg the question**: The original meaning of *beg the question* is *take for granted the very thing to be argued about*—not *invite the question*. In the words of Thomas Hurka, the former *Globe and Mail* 'Principles' columnist, "'begging the question' is *not* what Alex Trebek does on *Jeopardy*." The extension of the phrase to mean *invite the question* has become so widespread in recent years that it may be vain to think of the tide being reversed, but the original concept of question begging is a useful one, and we should be reluctant to allow it to disappear.

wrong	This sort of sexual abuse case begs the question as to how such behavior could be hidden for so many years.
right	This sort of sexual abuse case makes us wonder how such behavior could be hidden for so many years.

225. **bored/boring**: *Bored* is the opposite of *interested* and *boring* is the opposite of *interesting*. In other words, one is quite likely to be bored when someone reads out what one has already read in the newspaper, or when one is watching a football game when the score is 38–0, or when one is doing an uninteresting job. To be bored, however, is not the same as being sad, or depressed, or irritated, or angry.

wrong	She was so bored with her husband that she tried to kill him.
right	She was so angry with her husband that she tried to kill him.

226. **breach/breech**: To *breach* a wall or a contract is to break or break

through it, and the breach is the breaking. *Breech* refers to a part of a cannon or rifle—or to the buttocks (hence a "breech birth" in which the buttocks or feet emerge before the head).

wrong The lawyers claimed that her actions constituted a breech of contract.

right The lawyers claimed that her actions constituted a breach of contract.

227. **brusque/brisk**: To be *brusque* is *to be abrupt or slightly rude in speech or manner*; *brisk* means *quick or lively*.

wrong He didn't say anything rude to me, but his manner was rather brisk.

right He didn't say anything rude to me, but his manner was rather brusque.

Beating Around the Bush?

Anyone who speaks a good deal in public on an impromptu basis will utter the odd absurdity, but George W. Bush has had more problems with meaning than most. A few examples:

- "The future will be better tomorrow."
- "I believe we are on an irreversible trend toward more freedom and democracy—but that could change."
- "It isn't pollution that's harming our environment. It's the impurities in our air and water that are doing it."
- "A low voter turnout is an indication of fewer people going to the polls."
- "Republicans understand the importance of bondage between a mother and child."
- "I am not part of the problem. I am a Republican."
- "I stand by all the misstatements that I've made."

228. **can/may**: In formal writing *can* should be used to refer to ability, *may* to refer to permission.

wrong Can I leave the room?
(This makes literal sense only if you are an injured person conversing with your doctor.)

right May I leave the room?

229. **capital/capitol**: As a noun, *capital* can refer to *wealth*, to *the city from which the government operates*, to *an upper case letter*, or to *the top of a pillar*. It can also be used as an adjective to mean *most important* or *principal*. *Capitol* is much more restricted in its meaning—*a specific American legislative building* or *Roman temple*.

wrong The prosecution alleged that he had committed a capitol offence.
right The prosecution alleged that he had committed a capital offence.

230. **career/careen**: As a verb, *career* means *to swerve wildly*. *Careen* originally meant *to tilt or lean*, but now in North America especially is often treated as a synonym for *career*. Since *careen* has other specifically nautical meanings, some authorities resist the conflation of the two verbs.

231. **careless/uncaring**: *Careless* means *negligent* or *thoughtless*; you can be careless about your work, for example, or careless about your appearance. Do not use *careless*, however, when you want to talk about not caring enough about other people.

wrong He acted in a very careless way towards his mother when she was sick.
right He acted in an uncaring way towards his mother when she was sick.

232. **censor/censure**: To *censor* something is *to prevent it, or those parts of it that are considered objectionable, from being available to the public*. To *censure* someone is *to express strong criticism or condemnation*.

wrong The Senate censored the Attorney General for his part in the scandal.
right The Senate censured the Attorney General for his part in the scandal.

233. **classic/classical**: As an adjective *classic* means *of such a high quality that it has lasted or is likely to last for a very long time*. *Classical* is used to refer to *ancient Greece and Rome*, or, particularly when speaking of music, to refer to *a traditional style*.

wrong Sophocles was one of the greatest classic authors; his plays are classical.

right Sophocles was one of the greatest classical authors; his plays are acknowledged classics.

234. **childish/childlike**: The first is a term of abuse, the second a term of praise.

wrong Her writing expresses an attractive childish innocence.
right Her writing expresses an attractive childlike innocence.

235. **climatic/climactic**: Weather is not necessarily the most exciting part of life.

wrong Difficulties in predicting long-term trends are inherent in any climactic projections.
right Difficulties in predicting long-term trends are inherent in any climatic projections.

236. **collaborate/corroborate**: To *collaborate* is *to work together*, whereas to *corroborate* is *to give supporting evidence*.

wrong He collaborated her claim that the Americans had corroborated with the Nazi colonel Klaus Barbie.
right He corroborated her claim that the Americans had collaborated with the Nazi colonel Klaus Barbie.

237. **compliment/complement**: To *compliment* someone is *to praise* him, and a *compliment* is *the praise*; to *complement* something is *to add to it to make it better or complete*, and a *complement* is *the number or amount needed to make it complete*.

wrong None of the divisions had its full compliment of troops.
right None of the divisions had its full complement of troops.
wrong Gretzky's mission in New York will be to compliment Mark Messier, the team's captain and franchise player. (Associated Press story, Oct. 1, 1996)
(Literally, this would mean that the hockey player's job was to keep saying "Nice work, Mark," and so on.)
right Gretzky's mission in New York will be to complement Mark Messier, the team's captain and franchise player.

238. **comprise/compose**: The whole *comprises* or includes the various parts; the parts *compose* the whole.

wrong The British government is comprised of far fewer ministries than is the Canadian government.

right The British government comprises far fewer ministries than does the Canadian government.
or The British government is composed of far fewer ministries than is the Canadian government.

239. **conscience/conscious/consciousness**: To be *conscious* is to be *awake and aware of what is happening*, whereas *conscience* is *the part of our mind that tells us it is right to do some things and wrong to do other things* (such as steal or murder). *Conscience* and *consciousness* are both nouns; the adjectives are *conscientious* (aware of what is right and wrong) and *conscious* (aware).

wrong She was tempted to steal the chocolate bar, but her conscious told her not to.
right She was tempted to steal the chocolate bar, but her conscience told her not to.

240. **contemptuous/contemptible**: We are *contemptuous* of anyone or anything we find *contemptible*.

wrong The judge called the delinquent's behavior utterly contemptuous.
right The judge called the delinquent's behavior utterly contemptible.

241. **continual/continuous**: If something is *continuous* it *never stops*; something *continual* is *frequently repeated but not unceasing*. The same distinction holds for the adverbs *continually* and *continuously*.

wrong He has been phoning me continuously for the past two weeks. (Surely he stopped for a bite to eat or a short nap.)
right He has been phoning me continually for the past two weeks.

242. **copyright**: *Copyright* is *the right to make copies of something*. The fact that these are often of written material has encouraged a confusion of spelling.

wrong The software company plans to copywrite some of the advances it will introduce this year.
right The software company plans to copyright some of the advances it will introduce this year.

243. **council/counsel**; **councillor/counsellor**: A *council* is *an assembled group of officials*, and a *councillor is a member of that group*. *Counsel* is

advice, or in the special case of a lawyer, *the person offering advice*. In other situations the person offering *counsel* is a *counsellor*.

wrong The city counsel met to discuss the proposed bylaw.
right The city council met to discuss the proposed bylaw.
wrong The lawyer offered sound council as to the advisability of launching a suit.
right The lawyer offered sound counsel as to the advisability of launching a suit.
wrong Overall, she enjoyed summer camp, but she did not like her councillor.
right Overall, she enjoyed summer camp, but she did not like her counsellor.

244. **credible/credulous**: Someone *credulous* (believing) is likely to believe anything, even if it is not *credible* (believable).

wrong "Maybe I'm too credible," she said. "I believe everything my husband tells me."
right "Maybe I'm too credulous," she said. "I believe everything my husband tells me."

245. **decimate**: Most etymologists agree that originally this word meant *kill one of every ten*. It has come to be used more loosely to mean *destroy a considerable number of*, and sometimes *kill nine of every ten*, but it is best not to use it in a way that some authorities feel, as H.W. Fowler puts it, "expressly contradicts the proper sense."

wrong The regiment was decimated; fewer than 40 per cent of the troops survived.
right The regiment suffered extreme losses; fewer than 40 per cent of the troops survived.

246. **deduce/deduct**: *Deduction* is the noun stemming from both these verbs, which is perhaps why they are sometimes confused. To *deduce* is *to draw a conclusion*, whereas to *deduct* is *to subtract*.

wrong Sherlock Holmes deducted that Moriarty had committed the crime.
right Sherlock Holmes deduced that Moriarty had committed the crime.

247. **definite/definitive**: If something is *definite* then *there is no uncertainty* about it; a *definitive* version of something fixes it in its *final*

or permanent form—just as a dictionary definition attempts to fix the meaning of a word. Often a sentence is better with neither of these words.

wrong Glenn Gould's recording of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos is often thought of as the definite modern version.
right Glenn Gould's recording of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos is often thought of as the definitive modern version.
wrong Once we have completed our caucus discussion I will be making a very definitive statement.
right Once we have completed our caucus discussion I will be making a statement.
or Once we have completed our caucus discussion I will have something definite to say.

248. **degradation/decline**: *Degradation* carries the connotation of shame and disgrace. To *degrade* something is not to reduce it, or downgrade it, or destroy it.

wrong Among those units in which women played a combat role there was no degradation in operational effectiveness.
right Among those units in which women played a combat role there was no decline in operational effectiveness.
or ... there was no reduction in operational effectiveness.
wrong According to some authorities, the Iraqi threat has now been significantly degraded.
right According to some authorities, the Iraqi threat has now been significantly reduced.

249. **deny/refute**: To *deny* something is *to assert that it is not true*; to *refute* it is *to prove conclusively that it is not true*.

wrong During yesterday's press conference the President angrily refuted the allegations: "There has been no improper relationship," he said.
right During yesterday's press conference, the President angrily denied the allegations: "There has been no improper relationship," he said.

250. **deprecate/depreciate**: To *deprecate* something is *to suggest that it is not valuable or worthy of praise*; something that *depreciates* loses its value.

wrong Robert Stanfield is a very self-depreciating man.
right Robert Stanfield is a very self-deprecating man.

251. **discrete/discreet**: *Discrete* means *separate* or *distinct*, whereas *discreet* means *prudent and tactful*; *unwilling to give away secrets*.

wrong David Letterman is not renowned for being discrete.
right David Letterman is not renowned for being discreet.

252. **disinterested/uninterested**: A *disinterested* person is *unbiased*; *uninfluenced by self-interest, especially of a monetary sort*. It is thus quite possible for a person who is entirely *disinterested* in a particular matter to be completely fascinated by it. If one is *uninterested* in something, on the other hand, one is *bored* by it.

wrong He was so disinterested in the game that he left after the fifth inning with the score at 2–2.
right He was so uninterested in the game that he left after the fifth inning with the score at 2–2.
wrong The controlling shareholders had grown tired of the CEO's futuristic strategies and disinterest in day-to-day operations.
right The controlling shareholders had grown tired of the CEO's futuristic strategies and lack of interest in day-to-day operations.

253. **disorient/disorientate**: Both are considered correct by many authorities, but the extra syllable of the second grates on the ear.

poor I was entirely disorientated in the darkness.
better I was entirely disoriented in the darkness.

254. **dissemble/disassemble**: To *dissemble* is *to disguise your feelings*—a mild form of lying. To *disassemble* is *to take apart*.

wrong For the test we are required to first assemble and then dissemble a six-cylinder engine.
right For the test we are required to first assemble and then disassemble a six-cylinder engine.

255. **dissociate/disassociate**: There is no need for the extra syllable.

poor T.S. Eliot speaks of the disassociation of sensibility that began in the seventeenth century.
better T.S. Eliot speaks of the dissociation of sensibility that began in the seventeenth century.

256. **distinct/distinctive**: *Distinct* means *able to be seen or perceived clearly*; *easily distinguishable from those around it. Distinctive* means

unusual; *not commonly found*. There is a similar contrast between the adverbs *distinctly* and *distinctively*, and the nouns *distinction* and *distinctiveness*.

wrong	I distinctively heard the sound of a car engine.
right	I distinctly heard the sound of a car engine.

257. **economic/economical**: *Economic* means *pertaining to economics*, or *sufficient to allow a reasonable return for the amount of money or effort put in*. *Economical* is a word applied to people, which means *thrifty*. The difference applies as well to *uneconomic* and *uneconomical*.

wrong	Controversy over whether it would be economical to develop the vast Hibernia oilfield continued for many years.
right	Controversy over whether it would be economic to develop the vast Hibernia oilfield continued for many years.

258. **effective/efficacious/effectual/efficient**: *Effective*, *efficacious,* and *effectual* all mean *sufficient to produce the desired effect*. *Efficacious*, however, applies only to things: a person cannot be efficacious. *Effectual* was once applied only to actions, but is now sometimes applied to people as well. *Effective* can apply to actions or people. *Efficient* has an added connotation: *producing results with little waste of money or effort*. Thus a promotional campaign to persuade people to buy a product by giving away free samples to every man, woman, and child in the country might be *effective*, but it would certainly not be *efficient*; a good deal of waste would be involved. The same difference applies to the nouns *effectiveness* and *efficiency*. (*Efficacy* is a rather pretentious noun that is usually best avoided.)

wrong	The Board wants to increase the efficacy of the machinery we use.
right	The Board wants to increase the efficiency of the machinery we use.
poor	It would not be efficacious to launch a direct mail campaign with a product of this sort.
better	It would not be effective to launch a direct mail campaign with a product of this sort.

259. **e.g./i.e.**: The abbreviation *e.g.* is short for *exempli gratia* ("examples given"). It is sometimes confused with the abbreviation *i.e.*, which is short for *id est* ("that is to say").

wrong Those citizens of India who speak Hindi (e.g., the vast majority of the population) are being encouraged by the government to learn a second language.
right Those citizens of India who speak Hindi (i.e. the vast majority of the population) are being encouraged by the government to learn a second language.

260. **elemental/elementary**: A thing is *elemental* if it forms *an important or essential element of the whole*; it is *elementary* if it is *easy to understand*, or *at a relatively simple level*.

wrong He lacked even the most elemental understanding of the problem.
right He lacked even the most elementary understanding of the problem.

261. **elicit/illicit**: *Elicit* is a verb; one *elicits* information about something. *Illicit* is an adjective meaning *illegal* or *not approved*.

wrong She has been dealing in elicit drugs for some time.
right She has been dealing in illicit drugs for some time.
or The police elicited details about her drug use.

262. **eligible/illegible**: One is *eligible* for a job or for membership in an organization *if one meets the standard set for applicants*. One of the requirements might be that one's handwriting not be *illegible*.

wrong He regretted that I was not illegible to join his club.
right He regretted that I was not eligible to join his club.

263. **emigrant/immigrant**: To *migrate* is to move from one place to another. The prefix *ex*, shortened to *e*, means *out of*, so an *emigrant* from a country is *someone who is moving out of it*. The prefix *in* or *im* means *in* or *into*, so an *immigrant* to a country is *someone moving into it*. Similarly, *emigration* is *the movement of people out of a country*, while *immigration* is *the movement of people into a country*. Notice the spelling in both cases; e-migrant (one *m*), im-migrant (two *m*s).

wrong More than 100,000 emigrants entered America last year.
right More than 100,000 immigrants entered America last year.

264. **eminent/imminent/immanent**: A person is *eminent* if she is *well-known and well-respected*; an event is *imminent* if it is *about to happen*; a quality (or a god) is *immanent* if it *pervades everything*.

wrong Even those working for the party in the campaign did not believe that a majority victory was immanent.
right Even those working for the party in the campaign did not believe that a majority victory was imminent.

265. **enervate/invigorate**: Because of the similarity in sound between *enervate* and *energy*, it is often thought to mean *make more energetic*. In fact it means just the opposite—*to lessen the strength of*. If something makes you more energetic it *invigorates* you.

wrong She found the fresh air quite enervating; I haven't seen her so lively in months.
right She found the fresh air quite invigorating; I haven't seen her so lively in months.

266. **enormity/enormousness**: Originally the adjective *enormous* simply meant *deviating from the norm*, but by the early nineteenth century it had also come to mean *abnormal, monstrous*, or *extraordinarily wicked*. Today the only meaning is of course *vast* in size or quantity, but the connotation of wickedness is preserved in the noun *enormity*. We may speak of the *enormity* of a person's crime, but if we want a noun to express vast size we should use *enormousness* or *vastness*.

wrong What most impresses visitors to the Grand Canyon is usually its sheer enormity.
right What most impresses visitors to the Grand Canyon is its sheer enormousness.
better What most impresses visitors to the Grand Canyon is its vastness.

267. **epithet/epigraph/epitaph/epigram**: four words often confused. Here are their meanings:

- *Epithet*—an adjective or short phrase describing someone ("The Golden Brett, the epithet often used to describe Brett Hull, involves an allusion to the nickname of his famous father.").
- *Epigraph*—an inscription, especially one placed upon a building, tomb, or statue to indicate its name or purpose.
- *Epitaph*—words describing a dead person, often the words inscribed on the tomb.
- *Epigram*—a short, witty, or pointed saying.

wrong His epigram will read, "A good man lies here."
right His epitaph will read, "A good man lies here."

268. **equal/equitable/equable**: Things that are *equal* have the *same value*. Arrangements that are *equitable* are *fair and just*. An *equable* person is one who is *moderate and even-tempered*.

wrong The distribution of Commons and Senate seats is an equable one; in almost every case the percentage of combined seats allocated to a province closely approximates the percentage of the Canadian population made up by its inhabitants.

right The distribution of Commons and Senate seats is an equitable one; in almost every case the percentage of combined seats allocated to a province closely approximates the percentage of the Canadian population made up by its inhabitants.

269. **explicit/implicit**: If something is *explicit* it is *unfolded*—stated in precise terms, not merely suggested or implied. Something that is *implicit* is *folded in*—not stated overtly. By extension *implicit* has also come to mean *complete* or *absolute* in expressions such as *implicit trust* (i.e., trust so complete that it does not have to be put into words).

wrong I told you implicitly to have the report on my desk first thing this morning.

right I told you explicitly to have the report on my desk first thing in the morning.

270. **financial/fiscal/monetary/economic**: The terms used in personal, business, and government finance are not always the same. Here are four that are often not clearly understood:

- *Financial*—having to do with finance or the handling of money.
- *Fiscal*—having to do with public revenue.
- *Monetary*—having to do with the currency of a country. (Only in very limited circumstances, such as the expression *monetary value*, can monetary have the more general meaning of *having to do with money*.)
- *Economic*—having to do with the economy. Thus a government's *economic* program embraces both *fiscal* and *monetary* policies.

wrong My brother is a nice person, but he has no monetary ability.

right My brother is a nice person, but he has no financial ability.

271. **finish/be finished/have finished**: In slang usage *to be finished* means *to be at the end of one's life or career* (*If that player's knee is*

seriously injured again, he is finished). This special use should not be extended to the verb *finish* in its normal meaning.

wrong Are you finished your work?
right Have you finished your work?

272. **flammable/inflammable**: The two words share the same meaning; *flammable* may have originated because of the possibility for confusion over the word *inflammable*, which looks like a negative but isn't. *Non-flammable* should be used to mean *difficult or impossible to burn*.

wrong Asbestos is an inflammable material.
right Asbestos is a non-flammable material.

273. **flout/flaunt**: To *flout* is *to disobey or show disrespect for*; to *flaunt* is *to display very openly*.

wrong Aggressive policing seems to have increased the number of people flaunting the law.
right Aggressive policing seems to have increased the number of people flouting the law.

274. **formerly/formally**: The similarity of sound often leads to confusion.

wrong In August Mr. Laurel formerly broke with Mrs. Aquino.
right In August Mr. Laurel formally broke with Mrs. Aquino.

275. **fortunate/fortuitous**: *Fortunate* means *lucky*; *fortuitous* means *happening by chance.*

wrong This combination of circumstances is not a fortuitous one for our company; we shall have to expect reduced sales in the coming year.
right This combination of circumstances is not a fortunate one for our company; we shall have to expect reduced sales in the coming year.

276. **forward/foreword**: You find a *foreword* before the other words in a book.

wrong The author admits in the forward to her book that the research was not comprehensive.
right The author admits in the foreword to her book that the research was not comprehensive.

277. **founder/flounder**: As a verb, *founder* means *to get into difficulty, to stumble or fall, to sink* (when speaking of a ship), or *to fail* (when speaking of a plan). To *flounder* is *to move clumsily or with difficulty*, or *to become confused* in an effort to do something.

wrong He foundered about in a hopeless attempt to solve the problem.
right He floundered about in a hopeless attempt to solve the problem.

278. **further/farther**: *Farther* refers only to physical distance.

wrong Eisenhower argued that the plan should receive farther study.
right Eisenhower argued that the plan should receive further study.

279. **historic/historical**: *Historic* means *of sufficient importance that it is likely to become famous in history*; *historical* means *having to do with history* (historical research, historical scholarship, etc.).

wrong We are gathered here for a historical occasion—the opening of the city's first sewage treatment plant.
right We are gathered here for a historic occasion—the opening of the city's first sewage treatment plant.

280. **hopefully**: one of the greatest causes of disagreement among grammarians. Traditionalists argue that the correct meaning of the adverb *hopefully* is *filled with hope*, and that the use of the word to mean *it is to be hoped that* is therefore incorrect. On the other side it is plausibly argued that many adverbs can function as independent comments at the beginning of a sentence. (*Finally, let me point out that ...*; *Clearly, we have much to do if we are to ...* ; *Obviously, it will not be possible to ...*). Why should *hopefully* be treated differently? Why indeed? Using *hopefully* for this purpose may not make for beautiful English, but it should not be regarded as a grievous error.

poor Hopefully, it will be possible to finish before tomorrow.
(As usually happens, "hopefully" is here used with the passive, making for a wordy sentence.)
better We hope we can finish before tomorrow.
poor Hopefully, we will arrive before dusk.
(This sentence should be rewritten in order to ensure that the sentence does not suggest the meaning, "we will arrive filled with hope before dusk.")
better I hope we will arrive before dusk.

281. **human/humane**: Until the eighteenth century there was no distinction made between the two in either meaning or pronunciation; they were simply alternative ways of spelling the same word. In recent centuries *humane* has come to be used to refer exclusively to the more attractive human qualities—kindness, compassion, and so forth.

wrong Their group is campaigning for the human treatment of animals.
right Their group is campaigning for the humane treatment of animals.

282. **idioms**: Similarity in sound and meaning between words often leads to the mixing-up of idioms.

wrong Authorities termed it a democratic transition, but for all intensive purposes it was a *coup d'état*.
right Authorities termed it a democratic transition, but for all intents and purposes it was a *coup d'état*.
wrong The new recruits were reminded that they would have to tow the line.
right The new recruits were reminded that they would have to toe the line.

283. **illusion/allusion**: An *allusion* is *an indirect reference to something*; an *illusion* is *something falsely supposed to exist*.

wrong Joyce is making an illusion in this passage to a Shakespearean sonnet.
right Joyce is making an allusion in this passage to a Shakespearean sonnet.

284. **imply/infer**: To *imply* something is *to suggest it without stating it directly*; the other person will have to *infer* your meaning. It may be a comfort to the many who have confused the two to know that the mistake goes back at least as far as Milton:

wrong Great or Bright infers not Excellence. (*Paradise Lost* viii, 91)
right Great or Bright implies not Excellence.
(The fact that a thing is great or bright does not imply that it is also excellent.)
wrong I implied from his tone that he disliked our plan.
right I inferred from his tone that he disliked our plan.

285. **in to/into**: The difference is that *into* is used to indicate movement from outside to inside.

wrong Writers in Britain generally expressed sympathy for Rushdie's decision, although some said he was caving into pressure.
right Writers in Britain generally expressed sympathy for Rushdie's decision, although some said he was caving in to pressure.

286. **incidents/incidence**: *Incidents* is the plural of *incident* (happening), whereas *incidence* is a singular noun meaning *the rate at which something occurs*.

wrong The incidents of lung cancer is much lower in Zambia than it is in North America.
right The incidence of lung cancer is much lower in Zambia than it is in North America.

287. **ingenious/ingenuous**: *Ingenious* means *clever*; *ingenuous* means *pleasantly open and unsophisticated.*

wrong Her manner was completely ingenious; I cannot imagine she was trying to deceive us.
right Her manner was completely ingenuous; I cannot imagine she was trying to deceive us.

288. **innumerable**: so numerous that it is impossible to count; do not use as a synonym for *many*.

wrong Scholars have advanced innumerable explanations for the dinosaurs' disappearance.
right Scholars have advanced many explanations for the dinosaurs' disappearance.

289. **insist/persist**: To *insist* (that something be done, or on doing something) is *to express yourself very forcefully*. To *persist* in doing something is *to keep on doing it*, usually despite some difficulty or opposition.

wrong Even after he had been convicted of the crime, he persisted that he was innocent.
right Even after he had been convicted of the crime, he insisted that he was innocent.

290. **instinctive/instinctual**: There is no difference in meaning; it is thus better to stay with the older (and more pleasant sounding) *instinctive*.

poor Biologists disagree as to what constitutes instinctual behavior.
better Biologists disagree as to what constitutes instinctive behavior.

291. **judicial/judicious**: *Judicial* means *having to do with law courts and the administration of justice*. *Judicious* means *having good judgement*.

wrong He made one or two judicial comments about the quality of the production.
right He made one or two judicious comments about the quality of the production.

292. **know**: When one *knows* something, that piece of knowledge has been in one's mind for some time. The process of gathering or acquiring knowledge is called *discovering*.

wrong Although I noticed the new employee on Monday, I did not know her name until today.
right Although I noticed the new employee on Monday, I did not discover her name until today.

293. **later/latter**: *Later* means *afterwards in time*, whereas the *latter* is *the last mentioned* (of two things).

wrong I looked up the battle of Stalingrad in both the *World Book* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The later provided much more information.
right I looked up the battle of Stalingrad in both the *World Book* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The latter provided much more information.

294. **laudable/laudatory**: *Laudable* means *worthy of praise*; *laudatory* means *expressing praise*.

wrong His efforts to combat poverty are very laudatory.
right His efforts to combat poverty are very laudable.

295. **liable/likely**: *Liable* means *obliged by law* (*You will be liable for any damage caused when you are driving the vehicle*), or *in danger of doing or suffering from something undesirable* (*That chimney is liable to fall*). Since in the latter meaning *likely* can often be used in place of *liable*, it is often assumed that there is really no distinction between the two. Careful writers, however, do not use *liable* unless they are referring to possible consequences of an undesirable nature.

poor Last Sunday Woods won the Colonial Open. He's liable to win again before the Canadian Open.

better Last Sunday Woods won the Colonial Open. He's likely to win again before the Canadian Open.

296. **libel/slander**: *Libel* is *written* (and published); *slander* is *oral*.

wrong He was careful in his speech to avoid making any libellous remarks.

right He was careful in his speech to avoid making any slanderous remarks.

297. **lightning/lightening**: One is not likely to see the sky *lightening* until after the thunder and *lightning* are over.

wrong Three of the men were severely injured by the lightening.

right Three of the men were severely injured by the lightning.

298. **literally**: *Literal* means *by the letter*—in exact agreement with what is said or written. A literal meaning is thus the opposite of a figurative or metaphorical meaning. Do not use the adverb *literally* simply to emphasize something.

wrong As silviculturalists we are—literally—babes in the woods. (Ken Drushka, *Stumped: The Forest Industry in Transition*)
(Silviculturalists may be literally in the woods, but they are not literally babes.)

right As silviculturalists we are babes in the woods.

299. **make/allow/make possible**: To *make* someone do something is *to force them to do it* (often against their wishes); to *allow* someone to do something is *to permit them* or *make it possible* for them to do something that they want to do.

wrong A new hospital wing is being built; this will make many more people come for treatment.

right A new hospital wing is being built; this will allow many more people to come for treatment.

or A new hospital wing is being built; this will make it possible for many more people to come for treatment.

300. **masterful/masterly**: *Masterful* means *domineering*; *masterly* means *exhibiting mastery* or *great skill.*

wrong Once again last night, Liona Boyd gave the audience a masterful performance.
right Once again last night, Liona Boyd gave the audience a masterly performance.

301. **mitigate/militate**: To *mitigate* something is *to make it less harsh or severe*; thus *mitigating* circumstances are those that make a criminal offence less serious. To *militate* against something is *to act as a strong influence against it.*

wrong The natural history orientation of early anthropology also mitigated against studies of change. (Bruce G. Trigger in *Natives and Newcomers*)
right The natural history orientation of early anthropology also militated against studies of change.

302. **momentarily**: *Momentarily* means *lasting only a moment* (*He was momentarily confused*). Common usage also allows the word to mean *in a moment* or *soon*; in formal writing it is best to avoid this use.

poor Ms. Billings has informed me that she will join us momentarily.
better Ms. Billings told me that she will join us soon.

303. **need/want**: The verb *need* conveys the idea that it would be difficult or impossible for you to do without the needed thing. If you are talking about acquiring something that is not necessary or essential, use *want* instead; everyone *needs* water and food, but no one really *needs* a television. Be careful too not to commit to paper the slang use of *need to* for *should*.

wrong I need to marry someone who is very beautiful, very intelligent, very kind, and very rich.
right I want to marry someone who is very beautiful, very intelligent, very kind, and very rich.
wrong The government needs to improve the roads in this area.
right The government should improve the roads in this area.

304. **non sequitur**: A *non sequitur* is a *statement that has no clear relationship with what has preceded it*. There may be some connection within the mind of the speaker or writer, but it has not been expressed in words.

wrong It's time our government did something to help southern Africa. Besides, consumers appreciate inexpensive clothes.

right It's time our government did something to help southern Africa. Lowering the current barriers against importing cheap food and textiles would be an important step in that direction. Such a move would benefit our own citizens too; consumers appreciate inexpensive food and clothing.

305. **obligate/oblige**: These two words share the same Latin root but have different shades of meaning and are used rather differently. One feels a sense of obligation, but feels obliged to do something.

wrong She felt obligated to finish the book her friend had lent her.

right She felt obliged to finish the book her friend had lent her.

306. **of/have**: The difference in meaning is obvious, but the similarity in sound consistently leads people to write sentences involving such meaningless expressions as *should of, would of, could of, may of, might of,* and *must of.*

wrong The experiment would of succeeded if the solution had been prepared correctly.

right The experiment would have succeeded if the solution had been prepared correctly.

wrong Hitler believed that Rommel should of been able to defeat Montgomery at EI Alamein.

right Hitler believed that Rommel should have been able to defeat Montgomery at EI Alamein.

307. **other**: if one uses the words *the other* it suggests that the thing or person one is about to mention is the *only other* one is going to write about. If there are several *others* to be mentioned, *another* is the word to choose.

wrong One reason Germany lost the Second World War was that she underestimated the importance of keeping the United States out of the conflict. The other reason was that her intelligence network was inferior to that of the Allies. Moreover, Hitler's decision to invade Russia was a disastrous mistake.

(Here the use of *the other* in the second sentence leads the reader to believe this is the only other reason. When a third reason is mentioned in the next sentence, the reader is taken by surprise.)

right One reason Germany lost the Second World War was that she underestimated the importance of keeping the United

States out of the conflict. Another reason was that her intelligence network was inferior to that of the Allies. Moreover, Hitler's decision to invade Russia was a disastrous mistake.

308. **our/are**: Like the substitution of *of* for *have*, the confusion of *our* and *are* should never survive the rough draft stage.

wrong Almost all are time is spent together.
right Almost all our time is spent together.

309. **palate/palette/pallet**: Your *palate* is in your mouth. An artist uses a *palette* to mix paint on. (By extension people often refer to the range of colors typically used by a painter as her palette.) Finally, a *pallet* (or skid) is a wooden frame designed for transporting goods.

wrong In his later work Matisse's pallet was more limited; much of his work was in unmodulated, primary colors.
right In his later work Matisse's palette was more limited; much of his work was in unmodulated, primary colors.

310. **partake/participate**: *Partake* refers to things (especially food and drink), *participate* to activities.

wrong The Governor General made a brief appearance, but did not partake in the festivities.
right The Governor General made a brief appearance, but did not participate in the festivities.

311. **persecute/prosecute**: To *persecute* someone is *to treat them in a harsh and unfair manner*, especially because of their political or religious beliefs. To *prosecute* someone is *to take legal action against them* in the belief that they have committed a crime.

wrong Catholics began to be prosecuted in England in the sixteenth century.
right Catholics began to be persecuted in England in the sixteenth century.

312. **persuade**: To *persuade* someone <u>of</u> something is *to make that person believe that it is true*. To persuade someone <u>to do</u> something is *to lead that person, through what one says, to do the desired thing*. If one does not succeed in making people believe or do what one wants, then one has not persuaded or convinced them, but only <u>tried</u> to persuade

them. (The confusion of *refute* with *deny* [above, number 249] is a parallel mistake.)

wrong After all Portia's persuasion Shylock still refuses to change his mind.
right After all Portia's attempts to persuade him, Shylock still refuses to change his mind.

313. **pore/pour**: As *The Globe and Mail Style Book* puts it, one should "not write of someone pouring over a book unless the tome in question is getting wet."

wrong After pouring over the evidence, the committee could find no evidence of wrongdoing.
right After poring over the evidence, the committee could find no evidence of wrongdoing.

314. **practical/practicable**: *Practical* means *suitable for use*, or *involving activity rather than theory*. *Practicable* means *able to be done*. Changing the railway system back to steam locomotives would be *practicable* but extremely *impractical*. In most cases *practical* is the word the writer wants; excessive use of *practicable* will make writing sound pretentious rather than important.

wrong We do not feel that the construction of a new facility would be practicable at this time.
right It would not be practical to construct a new facility now.

315. **prescribe/proscribe**: To *prescribe* something is *to recommend or order its use*; to *proscribe* something is *to forbid its use*.

wrong One local physician has already proscribed this new drug for a dozen of her patients, and in every case their condition has improved after taking it.
right One local physician has already prescribed this new drug for a dozen of her patients, and in every case their condition has improved after taking it.

316. **presently**: The subject of much disagreement among grammarians; should *presently* be restricted to its original meaning of *soon*, or should common usage of the word to mean *now* be allowed to spread unopposed? Traditionalists argue that the acceptance of both meanings encourages ambiguity, but in fact the verb tense usually makes clear whether the speaker means *soon* or *now* (*I will be there presently,*

I am presently working on a large project, etc.). Perhaps the best solution is to avoid the rather pompous *presently* altogether, and stick to those fine Anglo-Saxon words *soon* and *now*.

poor	I am seeing Mr. Jones presently.
better	I am seeing Mr. Jones now.
or	I will be seeing Mr. Jones soon.

317. **proposition/proposal**: The only formally correct meaning of *proposition* is *a statement that expresses an idea*, as in *This country is dedicated to the proposition that all humans are created equal*. It is better not to use it to mean *proposal*.

poor	The department has put forward a proposition for increasing sales.
better	The department has put forward a proposal for increasing sales.

318. **prove**: To *prove* something is *to eliminate any doubt whatsoever as to its truth*. Outside of mathematics, science, or philosophical logic *proof* is rarely possible; what one is doing when writing about history or political science or English is presenting an argument, not a *proof*. Be cautious in the claims you make in formal writing.

poor	The following passage proves that T.S. Eliot was anti-Semitic.
better	The following passage strongly suggests that T.S. Eliot was anti-Semitic.

319. **raise/rise**: Raise means *to lift*; rise means *to come up*.

wrong	They rose the curtain at 8 o'clock.
right	They raised the curtain at 8 o'clock.
or	The curtain rose at 8 o'clock.

320. **rational/rationale**: *Rational* is an adjective meaning *logical* or *sensible*. A *rationale* is *an explanation* for something.

wrong	The underlying rational for the proliferation of soaps and detergents is not to make our skin or clothes any cleaner, but to increase the profits of the manufacturers.
right	The underlying rationale for the proliferation of soaps and detergents is not to make our skin or clothes any cleaner, but to increase the profits of the manufacturers.

321. **ravish/ravage**: *Ravish* has two quite unrelated meanings—*to rape*, or *to fill with delight*. To *ravage* is *to damage or destroy*.

wrong The tree had been ravished by insects.
right The tree had been ravaged by insects.

322. **real/genuine**: The basic meaning of *real* is *existing*; the opposite of *fake* or *forged* is *genuine*.

poor The buyer had thought the painting was a Cezanne, but he soon discovered it was not real.
better The buyer had thought the painting was a Cezanne, but he soon discovered it was not genuine.

323. **reign/rein**: A monarch *reigns* over a territory; to control a horse you *rein* it in (using the reins).

wrong Megawati has so far shown no signs of reigning in the armed forces. (*The Economist*, April 21, 2001)
right Megawati has so far shown no signs of reining in the armed forces.

324. **respectively/respectfully**: *Respectively* means *in the order mentioned*; *respectfully* means *done with respect*.

wrong Green Bay, Denver, and San Francisco were, respectfully, the three best teams in the NFL last season.
right Green Bay, Denver, and San Francisco were, respectively, the three best teams in the NFL last season.

325. **reticent/reluctant**: *Reticent* means *reluctant to speak*; *reserved about speaking*. A country may be *reluctant* to go to war; it cannot be *reticent* to go to war. And to say *reticent to speak* is to repeat oneself.

wrong She was reticent to speak up, even when her family's reputation had been attacked.
right She was reluctant to speak up, even when her family's reputation had been attacked.
or She remained reticent, even when her family's reputation had been attacked.

326. **sensory/sensuous/sensual**: Advertising and pornography have dulled the distinction among these three adjectives. The meanings of *sensory* and *sensuous* are similar—*sensual* is the sexy one:

- *Sensory*—having to do with the senses.
- *Sensuous*—having to do with the senses, or appealing to the senses.
- *Sensual*—offering physical pleasure, especially of a sexual sort.

wrong Boswell suggested they go to a house of ill repute, but Johnson had no desire for sensuous pleasures.
right Boswell suggested they go to a house of ill repute, but Johnson had no desire for sensual pleasures.

327. **set/sit**: *Set* means *to place something somewhere*.

wrong I could remember everything, but I had difficulty sitting it down on paper.
right I could remember everything, but I had difficulty setting it down on paper.
wrong He asked me to set down on the couch.
right He asked me to sit down on the couch.

328. **simple/simplistic**: *Simplistic* is a derogatory word meaning *too simple* or *excessively simplified.*

wrong The questions were so simplistic that I was able to answer all but one correctly.
right The questions were so simple that I was able to answer all but one correctly.

329. **somehow**: *Somehow* means *by some method* (*Somehow I must repair my car so that I can arrive in time for my appointment*). It does not mean *in some ways*, *to some extent*, or *somewhat.*

wrong His brother is somehow mentally disturbed.
right His brother is mentally disturbed in some way.
or His brother is somewhat disturbed mentally.

330. **specially/especially**: *Specially* means *for a particular purpose* (*These utensils are specially designed for left-handed people*). *Especially* means *particularly* or *more than in other cases*.

wrong The entire system pleased her, but she was was specially happy to see that the computer program had been especially created for small business users.
right The entire system pleased her, but she was especially happy to see that the computer program had been specially created for small business users.

331. **stationary/stationery**: *Stationary* means *not moving*; *stationery* is *what you write on*.

wrong As Mr. Blakeney remembered it, Lord Taylor "would always park his car in the no-parking zone outside the Bessborough Hotel, leaving House of Lords stationary on the windshield."

right As Mr. Blakeney remembered it, Lord Taylor "would always park his car in the no-parking zone outside the Bessborough Hotel, leaving House of Lords stationery on the windshield."

332. **stimulant/stimulus**: *Stimulus* (plural stimuli) is the more general word for *anything that produces a reaction*; *stimulant* normally refers to *a drink or drug* that has a *stimulating* effect.

wrong The shocks were intended to act as stimulants to the rats that we used as subjects for the experiment.

right The shocks were intended to act as stimuli to the rats that we used as subjects for the experiment.

333. **tack/tact**: *Tack* is a sailing term; a different tack means *a different direction relative to the wind*. *Tact* is *skill in saying or doing the right or polite thing*.

wrong We will have to exercise all our tack in the coming negotiations.

right We will have to exercise all our tact in the coming negotiations.

334. **than/that**: The difference in meaning is obvious, but slips of the pen or typewriter too often allow this error to make it to the final draft.

wrong It turns out that the company needs more money that we had expected.

right It turns out that the company needs more money than we had expected.

335. **they/their/there/they're**: Four words that are confused perhaps more frequently than any others. *They* is a pronoun used to replace any plural noun (e.g., books, people, numbers). *There* can be used to mean *in* (or at) *that place*, or can be used as an introductory word before various forms of the verb *to be* (*there is, there had been*, etc.). *Their* is a possessive adjective meaning *belonging to them*. Beware in particular of substituting *they* for *there*:

wrong They were many people in the crowd.
right There were many people in the crowd.

The easiest way to check whether one is making this mistake is to ask if it would make sense to replace *they* with a noun. In the above sentence, for example, it would obviously be absurd to say, *The people were many people in the crowd*.

The confusion of *they*, *there*, and *their* is the sort of mistake that all writers are able to catch if they check their work carefully before writing the final draft.

wrong Soviet defenceman Mikhail Tatarinov is considered to be there enforcer. (*Peterborough Examiner*)
right Soviet defenceman Mikhail Tatarinov is considered to be their enforcer.
wrong There all going to the dance this Saturday.
right They're all going to the dance this Saturday.
or They are all going to the dance this Saturday.

336. **tiring/tiresome**: Something that is *tiring* makes you feel *tired*, though you may have enjoyed it very much. Something that is *tiresome* is *tedious* and *unpleasant*.

wrong Although it is tiresome for him, my father likes to play tennis at least twice a week.
right Although it is tiring for him, my father likes to play tennis at least twice a week.

337. **to/too/two**: *Too* can mean *also* or be used to indicate *excess* (*too many, too heavy*); *two* is of course the number.

wrong She seemed to feel that there was to much to do.
right She seemed to feel that there was too much to do.

338. **to/towards**: *Towards* indicates motion.

wrong The deer moved slowly to me through the tall grass.
right The deer moved slowly towards me through the tall grass.

339. **unexceptional/unexceptionable**: *Unexceptional* means *ordinary*, *not an exception*; *unexceptionable* means *you do not object* (or *take exception*) to the thing or person in question.

wrong One way the President pays for this is in the confusion and controversy that surround the unexceptional White House

plan to reflag 11 Kuwaiti tankers with the Stars and Stripes. It is a modest proposal that in itself should not cause the handwringing now being observed on Capitol Hill.

(The plan to reflag the tankers clearly was an exception; the U.S. had not done anything similar for years. What the writer means to say is that the plan is unexceptionable—that no one should have any objection to it.)

right One way the President pays for this is in the confusion and controversy that surround the unexceptionable White House plan to reflag 11 Kuwaiti tankers with the Stars and Stripes. It is a modest proposal that in itself should not cause the handwringing now being observed on Capitol Hill.

340. **unique/universal/perfect/complete/correct**: None of these can be a matter of degree. Something is either unique or not unique, perfect or imperfect, and so on.

wrong Frida Kahlo made a rather unique contribution to twentieth century art.

right Frida Kahlo made a unique contribution to twentieth century art.

or It is arguable that Frida Kahlo made a unique contribution to twentieth-century art.

341. **valid/true/accurate**: An *accurate* statement is one that is *factually correct*. A combination of *accurate* facts may not always give a *true* picture, however. For example, the statement *Former Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King often visited prostitutes* is entirely *accurate*, but gives a false impression; in fact King visited prostitutes to try to convince them of the error of their ways, not to use their services. *Valid* is often used carelessly and as a consequence may seem fuzzy in its meaning. Properly used it can mean *legally acceptable*, or *sound in reasoning*; do not use it to mean *accurate*, *reasonable*, *true*, or *well-founded*.

poor Churchill's fear that the Nazis would become a threat to the rest of Europe turned out to be valid.

better Churchill's fear that the Nazis would become a threat to the rest of Europe turned out to be well-founded.

poor Bergson (2002) makes a valid point about the motives of the French government being suspect in its dealings with African nations.

better Bergson (2002) has shown conclusively that the motives of the French government in its dealings with African nations were deeply suspect.

342. **vein/vain**: *Veins* run through your body; to be *vain* is to be *conceited*; *an effort that fails to brings any of the desired results* has been in *vain*.

wrong Shakespeare portrays Sir John Oldcastle—or Falstaff, as he is usually known—as vein and irresponsible but immensely amusing and likeable.

right Shakespeare portrays Sir John Oldcastle—or Falstaff, as he is usually known—as vain and irresponsible but immensely amusing and likeable.

343. **verbal/oral**: *Oral* means *spoken rather than written*, whereas *verbal* means *having to do with words*. A person who is unable to speak may have a high level of *verbal* skill.

wrong I can write well enough, but I have difficulty in expressing ideas verbally.

right I can write well enough, but I have difficulty in expressing ideas orally.

344. **were/where**: *Were* is of course a past tense form of the verb *to be*, while *where* refers to a place. Spell-check will not tell you if you have used the wrong word.

wrong This is the place were Dante met Beatrice.

right This is the place where Dante met Beatrice.

WORD ORDER PROBLEMS

Word order problems are of many sorts. See also, for example, the discussions elsewhere in this book of syntax; of ambiguity; of split infinitives; of indefinite pronouns such as *each, every,* and *anyone*; and of *not only ... but also*.

345. **ambiguity/confusion**: Inappropriate word order is one of the most common sources of ambiguity and confusion. Often a change in punctuation may also be required to correct the problem.

wrong The liner tilted dramatically after fire broke out in the engine room, 50 miles south of Cyprus.

right The liner tilted dramatically after fire broke out in the engine room. At the time the ship was 50 miles south of Cyprus.

wrong He has not come under any pressure to make way for a new leader, despite the failure of any tangible benefits from his government's economic policies.

right He has not come under any pressure to make way for a new leader, despite the failure of his government's economic policies to bring any tangible benefits.

wrong Proportion of overweight people between 18 and 64 years trying to lose weight by sex in Alberta 1990. (Heading on chart, Alberta Heart Health Survey, reprinted in *The Calgary Herald*, June 3, 1994)

right Proportion in Alberta of overweight people between 18 and 64 years, by sex, who were trying to lose weight, 1990.

346. **amounts**: For no good reason, adjectives having to do with amounts or quantities (e.g., *much, few, many*) normally precede the noun or pronoun to which they refer, even when the verb *to be* is used. In this way such adjectives differ from other adjectives. For example, we can talk about *a happy man*, putting the adjective *happy* before the noun *man*, or we can use the present tense of the verb *to be* and say, *The man is happy*, in which case the adjective *happy* comes after the noun *man*. In contrast, it is not correct to say, *We were many at the meeting,* or *The people here are few.* Instead the sentence must be changed around, and the adjectives put before the nouns. The easiest way to do this is by using *there* and the verb *to be.* The revised versions of the above sentences are:

right There were many of us at the meeting.

right There are few people here.

A further example:

wrong The students at the football game were many.
right There were many students at the football game.

347. **balance**: Often paired connectives (*if ... then, either ... or* [given a separate entry below], *not only ... but also, both ... and*) can help in achieving balance. But here, as always, the writer must be careful that the words are in the right places; otherwise the fragile element of balance is lost:

wrong Hardy was not only a prolific novelist but wrote poetry too, and also several plays.
right Hardy was not only a prolific novelist but also a distinguished poet and a dramatist.
(The noun *novelist* is balanced by the later nouns *poet* and *dramatist*.)

wrong To subdue Iraq through sanctions, the United Nations felt, was better than using military force.
right To subdue Iraq through sanctions, the United Nations felt, was better than to use military force.
(The infinitive *to subdue* is balanced by the infinitive *to use*.)

wrong In 1972 there was a stop-McGovern movement and a stop-Carter movement in 1976.
right In 1972 there was a stop-McGovern movement and in 1976 a stop-Carter movement.
or In 1972 there was a stop-McGovern movement and in 1976 there was a stop-Carter movement.

wrong As a critic she is both fully aware of the tricks used by popular novelists to score easy successes with readers through stylized depictions of sex and violence, as well as realizing that "serious" novelists are sometimes not above resorting to the very same tricks.
right As a critic she is fully aware both of the tricks used by popular novelists to score easy successes with readers through stylized depictions of sex and violence, and of the fact that "serious" novelists are sometimes not above resorting to the very same tricks.

348. **direct object position**: The normal position for direct objects is after the verb. When the direct object is put at the beginning of a sentence it sounds awkward, and the word order may lead writers to include an extra, unwanted pronoun later in the sentence. It is therefore always best to keep the direct object after the verb.

wrong Some of the money I put it in the bank.
(Notice the extra pronoun *it*.)

right I put some of the money in the bank.
(*I* is the subject; *some of the money* is the direct object of *put*.)

349. **either ... or**: These words should directly precede the pair of things to which they refer. The same applies to *neither ... nor*.

wrong I will either pick an apple or a banana.
right I will pick either an apple or a banana.
(*Either* and *or* refer to *apple* and *banana*. Therefore they must come immediately before those words.)
wrong He will go either to New York for the holiday or remain here.
right He will either go to New York for the holiday or remain here.
(The choice is between going and remaining.)
wrong The experiment can either be performed with hydrogen or with oxygen.
right The experiment can be performed with either hydrogen or oxygen.
(The choice is between the two gases, not between performing and doing some other thing.)

350. **except**: A phrase beginning with *except* should appear directly after the noun or pronoun to which *except* refers.

wrong We all had to wait except for those who had bought tickets in advance.
right All except those who had bought tickets in advance had to wait.

351. **first person last**: When speaking about both yourself and another person (or other people), always mention the other person first. The first person pronoun (*I*, *me*) should come last.

wrong I and my brother decided to go shopping yesterday.
right My brother and I decided to go shopping yesterday.

352. **only**: The adverb *only* should come directly before the word or words it refers to. *She could only see him* implies that she could not hear, smell, or touch him; *She could see only him* implies that she had eyes for no one else.

wrong She only asked six people to the party.
right She asked only six people to the party.

353. **questions in indirect speech**: In a question we normally reverse the order of the subject and the verb. For example, to change the statement *She was sad* to a question, we reverse the order of *she* and *was* and ask, *Was she sad?* The same rule does not apply, however, to questions in indirect speech. These are considered to be part of a statement and, as in any other statement, the entire verb should come after the subject. For example, to turn the above sentence into indirect speech we would say, *I asked her whether she was sad* (not *I asked her was she sad*).

wrong I asked him how was he.
right I asked him how he was.
wrong She asked her brother where was he going.
right She asked her brother where he was going.

Notice as well that these sentences are statements, not questions. They therefore do not end with a question mark.

354. **relative pronouns**: Relative pronouns (*who, which, whom, whose,* etc.) normally refer to the word that has come immediately before them. This may sometimes turn out to be difficult, in which case the word order may have to be changed.

wrong He purchased his friend's shop, whom he had known for many years.
(The relative pronoun *whom* refers to *friend,* not *shop*. Change the word order to put *whom* directly after *friend*.)
right He purchased the shop from his friend, whom he had known for many years.
wrong On Saturday I went to my brother's wedding, whose new wife is a senior government official.
right On Saturday I went to the wedding of my brother, whose new wife is a senior government official.

TOO MANY WORDS, TOO FEW WORDS

Wordiness is perhaps the most persistent disease afflicting modern writing; references to it permeate this book. The mistake of including too few words in a sentence is much less common; most of the following entries, therefore, are instances of too many words rather than too few.

355. **actual/actually**: Usually redundant.

wrong Many people assume that Switzerland is made up entirely of bankers and watchmakers. In actual fact, the Swiss economy is very diversified.

right Many people assume that Switzerland is made up entirely of bankers and watchmakers. In fact, the Swiss economy is very diversified.

356. **as regards**: Use *about,* or rephrase.

wrong As regards your request for additional funding, we have taken the matter under advisement.

right We are considering your request for more money.

357. **as stated earlier**: If so, why state it again?

wrong The Venus flytrap, which as stated earlier is an insectivorous plant, grows only in a restricted area of New Jersey.

right The Venus flytrap grows only in a restricted area of New Jersey.

358. **as you know, as we all know**: Usually better omitted.

wrong As we all know, George W. Bush was elected President in 2000, even though more votes were cast for Al Gore.

right George W. Bush was elected President in 2000, even though more votes were cast for Al Gore.

359. **aspect**: Often a pointer to an entire phrase or clause that can be cut.

wrong The logging industry is a troubled one at the present time. One of the aspects of this industry that is a cause for concern is the increased production of cheaper timber in South America.

right The logging industry is now a troubled one. Increased production of cheaper timber in South America has reduced the market for North American wood.

360. **at a later date**: *Later*.

wrong We can decide this at a later date.
right We can decide this later.

361. **at the present time**: *Now*, or nothing.

wrong At the present time the company has ten employees.
right The company has ten employees.

362. **attention**: *It has come to my attention that* is almost always unnecessarily wordy.

wrong It has come to my attention that shipments last month were 15 per cent below targeted levels.
right Shipments last month were 15 per cent below targeted levels.

363. **basis/basically**: Both are often pointers to wordiness.

wrong On the basis of the information we now possess it is possible to see that William Bligh was not the ogre he was once thought to be. Basically, he was no harsher than most captains of the time.
right Recent research suggests that William Bligh was not the ogre he was once thought to be. He was no harsher than most captains of the time.

364. **cause**: Sentences using *cause* as a verb can often be rephrased more concisely; try to think of other verbs.

wrong The increased sales tax caused the people to react with fury.
right The increase in sales tax infuriated the people.
wrong The change in temperature caused the liquid to freeze within seventeen minutes.
right The liquid froze within seventeen minutes of the temperature change.

365. **close proximity to**: *Near*.

wrong The office is situated in close proximity to shops and transportation facilities.
right The office is near a shopping centre and a bus stop.

366 **e.g ... etc.**: If you begin by saying *for example*, it is redundant to add *and others* at the end of your list. See also immediately below, and under *such as* in the chapter on joining ideas together.

wrong In several African nations (e.g., Rwanda, Malawi, Zaire, etc.) tyrannical or murderous regimes were overthrown in the 1990s.

right In several African nations (e.g., Rwanda, Malawi, Zaire) tyrannical or murderous regimes were overthrown in the 1990s.

367. **etc.**: The Latin *et cetera,* or *etc*. for short, means *and the rest* or *and others*. To say *and etc*. is really to say *and and others*. Beware as well of combining *etc*. with expressions such as *such as.*

wrong During recent years several countries (Mexico, Argentina, and etc.) have amassed huge debts, which they are now unable to pay.

right During recent years several countries (Mexico, Argentina, etc.) have amassed huge debts, which they are now unable to pay.

wrong Plants such as Venus flytraps, pitcher plants, etc. feed on insects.

right Plants such as Venus flytraps and pitcher plants feed on insects.

or Some plants (Venus flytraps, pitcher plants, etc.) feed on insects.

368. **exists**: Often a pointer to wordiness.

wrong A situation now exists in which voters suspect the government's motives, regardless of whether or not they approve of its actions.

right Voters now suspect the government's motives even if they approve of its actions.

369. **fact**: Be wary of *the fact that*.

wrong Due to the fact that we have discontinued this product, we are unable to provide spare parts.

right Because we have discontinued this product we are unable to provide spare parts.

wrong The fact that every member nation has one vote in the General Assembly does not give each one equal influence.

right Each member nation has one vote in the General Assembly, but some have more influence than others.

wrong Despite the fact that virtually no one in those days could foresee the end of American surpluses, Jones could.
right Jones was one of the few to foresee the end of American surpluses.

370. **factor**: Heavily overused, and a frequent cause of wordiness.

wrong An important factor contributing to the French Revolution was the poverty of the peasantry.
right The poverty of the peasantry was a major cause of the French Revolution.

371. **from my point of view, according to my point of view, in my opinion**: All three expressions are usually redundant.

wrong From my point of view, basic health care is more important than esoteric and expensive machines or procedures that benefit few.
fair I think that basic health care is more important than esoteric and expensive machines or procedures that benefit few.
better Basic health care is more important than esoteric and expensive machines or procedures that benefit few.

372. **I myself**: In almost all cases the addition of *myself* is needlessly repetitive.

wrong I myself believe in freedom of speech.
right I believe in freedom of speech.

373. **in all probability**: *Probably*.

wrong In all probability we will be finished tomorrow.
right We will probably be finished tomorrow.

374. **include**: Often a needed word or two is omitted after this verb. The best solution may be to rephrase or find another verb.

wrong The report includes both secondary and post-secondary education.
right The report includes material on both secondary and post-secondary education.
or The report deals with both secondary and post-secondary education.
wrong The Thirty Years War included most countries in Europe.

right The list of countries that fought in the Thirty Years War includes almost every European nation.
right Almost every European country fought in the Thirty Years War.

375. **interesting**: In most cases the writer should not have to tell the reader that what he is saying is interesting.

wrong It is interesting to observe that illiteracy affects almost as high a proportion of native-born Americans as it does immigrants.
right Illiteracy affects almost as high a proportion of native-born Americans as it does immigrants.

376. **mean for**: The preposition is unnecessary.

wrong I did not mean for him to do it all himself.
right I did not mean that he should do it all himself.

377. **nature**: Often contributes to wordiness.

wrong The nature of the brain is to process information incredibly swiftly.
right The brain processes information extremely swiftly.

378. **personally**: It is safe to let your reader take it for granted that you are speaking for yourself rather than on behalf of others.

wrong Personally, I feel that the Supreme Court has usually exercised its constitutional authority wisely in recent years.
right I feel the Supreme Court has usually exercised its constitutional authority wisely in recent years.

379. **point in time**: *Now* or *then*.

wrong At that point in time central Africa was very sparsely populated.
right Central Africa was then very sparsely populated.

380. **really**: If an intensifier must be used, *very* is preferable.

wrong It is really important that this be done today.
right It is very important that this be done today.
or This must be done today.

Often, however, your point may be made more effectively without using intensifiers—and even without using adjectives:

needs checking Like any other animal raised in a modern factory farm, a factory-farmed pig leads a terribly appalling life. It spends its entire life in really hideous pens that do not permit it to turn around, let alone to walk or run. Such incredibly barbaric cruelty is justified on the grounds that without it, humans would be forced to pay somewhat more for bacon and ham.

revised Like any other animal raised in a modern factory farm, a factory-farmed pig leads an appalling life. It spends its entire life in pens that do not permit it to turn around, let alone to walk or run. Such cruelty is justified on the grounds that without it, humans would be forced to pay somewhat more for bacon and ham.

381. **regard, with regard to, as regards**: Try *about* or *over,* or rephrase.

wrong I am writing with regard to your proposal to centralize production.

right I am writing about your proposal to centralize production.

wrong As regards the trend in interest rates, it is likely to continue to be upward.

right Interest rates are likely to continue to increase.

wrong This Act gave the government powers with regard to the readjustment of industry.

right This Act gave the government powers over the readjustment of industry.

382. **redundancy**: Redundancies are words or expressions that repeat in different words a meaning already expressed. Commonly used expressions that involve redundancy include *end result*, *plans for the future, general public, nod your head, optimistic about the future, a personal friend of mine, mutual cooperation*. Sometimes a case may be made for using a phrase of this sort in order to emphasize a point. What is to be avoided is thoughtless and purposeless wordiness.

wordy This property will appreciate greatly in value.

better This property will appreciate greatly.

wordy The house is very large in size.

better The house is very large.
wordy It was decided it would be mutually beneficial to both of us if he left.
better It was decided it would be mutually beneficial if he left.
or We agreed it would be better for both of us if he left.

383. **situation**: By avoiding this word you will usually make your sentence shorter and better.

wrong This treaty created a situation in which European countries gave up a degree of autonomy in return for greater security.
right Through this treaty European countries gave up a degree of autonomy in return for greater security.

384. **there is/are/was/were**: These constructions often produce sentences that are needlessly long.

wrong There were many factors which undermined the government's popularity in this period.
right Many things undermined the government's popularity in this period.
wrong There are many historians who accept this thesis.
right Many historians accept this thesis.

385. **too few words**: This mistake can happen anywhere in a sentence. One of the best tests of whether or not a writer has checked her work is whether or not there are missing words. In almost all cases, such omissions will be noticed through careful proofreading.

wrong She rushed home to tell my family and about the accident.
right She rushed home to tell my family and me about the accident.
wrong Mrs. Gandhi reminded the Conference that just one intercontinental ballistic missile could plant 200 million trees, irrigate one million hectares of land, or build 6,500 health care centers. (United Nations official)
right Mrs. Gandhi reminded the Conference that the money spent on just one intercontinental ballistic missile could be used to plant 200 million trees, irrigate one million hectares of land, or build 6,500 health care centers.

386. **too many words**: Many of the causes of this problem have been given separate entries.

wrong So far as the purpose of this essay is concerned, it will concentrate on the expansion of Soviet power.
right This essay will concentrate on the expansion of Soviet power.
wrong Although the author does not claim to be writing a social study, the question arises whether the social implications of his analysis can be ignored.
right Although the author does not claim to be writing a social study, his analysis does have social implications.

387. **tragic/tragically**: Unnecessary use of either the adjective or the adverb constitutes overkill.

redundant Her husband, her child, and more than a hundred others died in a tragic plane crash in 1997.
better Her husband, her child, and more than a hundred others died in a plane crash in 1997.

388. **would like to take this opportunity to**: *Would like*.

wrong I would like to take this opportunity to thank my cousin in Peoria.
right I am very grateful to my cousin in Peoria.
or I would like to thank my cousin in Peoria.

ONE WORD OR TWO?

A number of very commonly used English words have over many years become accepted as one word because they are combined so often. Other similar combinations, however, should still be written as two words. In a few cases one can see English usage changing on this point right now. A generation ago, for example, *alright* as one word could not have been found in any dictionary. Now a few authorities are beginning to regard *alright* as acceptable, and perhaps in another generation or two it will have completely replaced *all right*. For the moment, though, it is best to stick with *all right* rather than the more colloquial *alright*.

389. **one word preferred**: What has been written as two words should be one. Here are some common examples:

already: one word when used as an adverb ("He has finished already.")
altogether: one word when used as an adverb to mean *completely* or *entirely* ("He is not altogether happy with the result.")
awhile: one word when used as an adverb
another
anybody
anyone: one word unless it is followed by *of*
bathroom
bloodshed
businessman (but see Bias-free Language page 191)
cannot: *can not* is less common, but still acceptable
everybody
everyday: one word when used as an adjective (e.g., "Brushing your teeth should be part of your everyday routine"—here *everyday* is an adjective modifying the noun *routine*.)
everyone: one word unless it is followed by *of*
everything
forever
furthermore
indeed
intact
into: one word except in the relatively few cases where the senses of *in* and *to* are clearly separate (Fowler uses the example, "the Prime Minister took her in to dinner.")
maybe: when used as an adverb meaning *perhaps* (e.g., *Maybe I will join you later*—here the verb is *will join* and *maybe* is an adverb.)
nearby

nobody
onto: see *into*
ourselves
somebody
someone
straightforward
themselves
wartime
whatever
whenever

390. **two words preferred**: What has been written as one word should be two words. Here are some common examples:

a lot
all ready: two words when not used as an adverb (*We are all ready to go.*)
all right
all together: two words when not used as an adverb (e.g., *They were all together when I left them.*)
every day: two words when not used as an adjective (e.g., *We see each other every day.*)
every time
in fact
in front
in order
in spite of
may be: two words when used as a verb (e.g., *He may be here later tonight—may be* is the verb in the sentence.)
no one

USAGE: WORD CONVENTIONS

391. **according to**: This expression normally is used only when one is referring to a person or to a group of people (e.g., *ccording to his lawyer, the accused was nowhere near the scene when the crime was committed*, *According to Shakespeare, Richard III was an evil king*).

wrong	According to geography, Congo is larger than all of Western Europe.
right	As we learn in geography, Congo is larger than all of Western Europe.
wrong	According to the story of *Cry the Beloved Country*, Stephen Kumalo has a quick temper.
right	The events of the story show that Stephen Kumalo has a quick temper.

392. **age/aged**: Do not use the noun *age* as a participle.

wrong	A woman age 35 was struck and killed by the car.
right	A woman aged 35 was struck and killed by the car.

393. **all of**: Many authorities advise that the expression *all of* should be avoided in the interests of economy. Perhaps so, but there is certainly no error involved, and in many cases the addition of the word *of* improves the rhythm of the sentence; Lincoln's famous maxim "You can not fool all the people all of the time" would not be improved by dropping the *of.*

394. **amount**: This word should be used only with things that are uncountable (sugar, goodwill, etc.).

wrong	A large amount of books were stolen from the library last night.
right	A large number of books were stolen from the library last night.

395. **and**: In most cases *or* rather than *and* should be used as a connective if the statement is negative.

wrong	Moose are not found in South America, Africa, and Australia.
right	Moose are not found in South America, Africa, or Australia.

396. **anyways/anywheres**: There is never a need for the *s*.

wrong	We were unable to find him anywheres.
right	We were unable to find him anywhere.

397. **as**: When this word is used to relate the times at which two actions happened, the actions must have happened at the same time (e.g., *As I got out of bed, I heard the sound of gunfire,* where the hearing happens during the action of getting out; *As he was walking to work, he remembered that he had left the stove on,* where the remembering happens during the walking). *As* should not be used in this way if the two actions happened at different times; if one action is completed before the other begins, always use *when*.

wrong As I had finished my geography assignment, I started my history essay.

right When I had finished my geography assignment, I started my history essay.
(The finishing happens before the starting.)

wrong As she discovered that the engine was overheating, she stopped the car immediately.

right When she discovered that the engine was overheating, she stopped the car immediately.
(The discovering happens before the stopping.)

Note: Since *when* can be used both when actions happen simultaneously and when they happen at different times, anyone who is at all uncertain about this point is wise to avoid using *as* to refer to time, and always stick to *when*. This has the added advantage of avoiding the possible ambiguity as to whether *as* is being used to mean *because* or to mean *when*.

398. **as/that/whether**: Do not use *as* to mean *that* or *whether*.

wrong I don't know as how I can do the job in time.

right I don't know whether I can do the job in time.

399. **back formations**: A back formation is the formation of a word from what one would expect to be its derivative. The verb *laze*, for example, is a back formation from the adjective *lazy*; a more recent (and similar-sounding) back formation is the verb *liaise* from the noun *liaison*. Many back formations may be created from negatives that lack a positive form *(kempt, gruntled, couth, gainly, continent, wieldy, solent,* etc.). These should of course be avoided in formal written English.

wrong Toronto is a pretty ruly place to watch a game. (Baseball Manager Lou Piniella, as quoted by Robertson Cochrane in *The Globe and Mail*, Oct. 29, 1994)

right Toronto is a pretty civilized place to watch a game.

400. **because of the following reasons/some reasons/many reasons**: The word *because* makes it clear that a cause or reason is being introduced. The addition of a phrase such as *of the following reasons* is redundant. Either use *because* on its own, or use *for the following reasons/many reasons*, etc.

wrong During her first few years in Canada, Susanna Moodie was unhappy because of several reasons.
right During her first few years in Canada, Susanna Moodie was unhappy for several reasons.

401. **both**: The expressions *both alike, both equal,* and *both together* involve repetition.

poor Macdonald and Cartier both arrived together at about eight o'clock.
better Macdonald and Cartier arrived together at about eight o'clock.

402. **can be able**: *I can do it* and *I am able to do it* mean the same thing. Using both verbs together is redundant.

wrong He thinks Minnesota can be able to win the Cup.
right He thinks Minnesota can win the Cup.
or He thinks Minnesota will be able to win the Cup.

403. **cannot help but**: One too many negatives; use *can but* or *cannot help*.

wrong He couldn't help but think he had made a mistake.
right He couldn't help thinking he had made a mistake.
or He could but think he had made a mistake.

404. **change**: You *make* a change (not do a change).

wrong The manager did several changes to the roster before the match with Russia.
right The manager made several changes to the roster before the match with Russia.

405. **comment**: We *make* comments (not say or do them).

wrong Anyone who wishes to say any comments will have a chance to speak after the lecture.
right Anyone who wishes to make any comments will have a chance to speak after the lecture.

406. **compared to/than**: The use of *compared to* as a participial phrase often leads to ambiguity and error. Unless one is speaking of one person *comparing* something to something else, it is usually better to use *than*.

wrong There were far fewer frogs in the area in 2002 compared to previous years.
right There were far fewer frogs in the area in 2002 than there had been in previous years.

407. **convince**: You *convince* people *that* they should do something, or *persuade* them *to* do it.

wrong Reagan's advisers convinced him to approve the arms for hostages deal with Iran.
right Reagan's advisers persuaded him to approve the arms for hostages deal with Iran.

408. **elder/older**: *Elder* can act as an adjective (*my elder son*) or a noun (*the elder of the two*). *Older* can act only as an adjective. If using than, use *older*.

wrong She is four years elder than her sister.
right She is four years older than her sister.

409. **for**: One use of this preposition is to show purpose. Normally, however, *for* can be used in this way only when the purpose can be expressed in one word (e.g., *for safety*, *for security*). It is not usually correct to try to express purpose by combining *for* with a pronoun and an infinitive: expressions such as *for him to be happy, for us to arrive safely* are awkward and should be avoided. Instead, one can express purpose either by beginning with an infinitive (e.g., *in order to make life easier, in order to increase yield per hectare*), or by using *so that* (e.g., *so that life will be made easier, so that yield per hectare will be increased*).

wrong Please speak slowly for me to understand what you say.
right Please speak slowly so that I can understand what you say.
wrong The team must work hard for it to have a chance at the Grey Cup.
right The team must work hard if it is to have a chance at the Grey Cup.

410. **forget**: To *forget* something is to fail to remember it, not to leave it somewhere.

wrong I forgot my textbook at home.
right I left my textbook at home.
or I forgot to bring my textbook from home.

411. **had ought/hadn't ought**: Use *ought* or *ought not* instead.

wrong He hadn't ought to have risked everything at once.
right He ought not to have risked everything at once.
or He should not have risked everything at once.

412. **hardly**: *Hardly* acts as a negative; there is thus no need to add a second negative.

wrong The advertisers claim that you can't hardly tell the difference.
right The advertisers claim that you can hardly tell the difference.

413. **how/what**: One may talk about *how* something (or someone) *is*, or *what* something (or someone) is *like*, but <u>not</u> *how* they are *like*.

wrong Tell me how it looks like from where you are.
right Tell me how it looks from where you are.
or Tell me what it looks like from where you are.
wrong I do not know how the roads are like between St. John's and Cornerbrook.
right I do not know what the roads are like between St. John's and Cornerbrook.
or I do not know how the roads are between St. John's and Cornerbrook.

414. **increase**: Numbers can be *increased* or *decreased*, as can such things as *production* and *population* (nouns which refer to certain types of numbers or quantities). Things such as *houses*, however, or *books* (nouns which do not refer to numbers or quantities) cannot be *increased*; only the <u>number</u> of houses, books, etc. can be *increased* or *decreased, raised* or *lowered*.

wrong The government has greatly increased low-rent houses in the suburbs of Seattle.
right The government has greatly increased the number of low-rent houses in the suburbs of Seattle.

415. **information**: One *gives* information (<u>not</u> tells it).

wrong He told me all the information I wanted about how to apply.
right He gave me all the information I wanted about how to apply.

416. **investigation**: We *make*, *carry out*, or *hold* an investigation (not do one).

wrong The manager did a thorough investigation into the disappearance of funds from his department.
right The manager made a thorough investigation into the disappearance of funds from his department.

417. **irregardless**: The result of confusion between *regardless* and *irrespective*. Use *regardless*.

wrong She told us to come for a picnic, irregardless of whether it is rainy or sunny.
right She told us to come for a picnic, regardless of whether it is rainy or sunny.

418. **is when/is where**: Many people use these phrases when attempting to define something. There is always a better way.

wrong Osmosis is when a fluid moves through a porous partition into another fluid.
right Osmosis occurs when a fluid moves through a porous partition into another fluid.
or Osmosis is the movement of a fluid through a porous partition into another fluid.

419. **journey**: You *make* a journey (not do one).

wrong If we do not stop along the way, we can do the journey in an hour.
right If we do not stop along the way, we can make the journey in an hour.

420. **law**: A law is *passed, made,* or *put into effect* by the government, and *enforced* by the police. Laws are not *put* or *done*.

wrong I think the government should put a law increasing the penalty for drunken driving.
right I think the government should pass a law increasing the penalty for drunken driving.

421. **less/fewer**: When something can be counted (e.g., people, books,

trees), use *fewer*. Use *less* only with uncountable nouns (e.g., sugar, meat, equipment).

wrong	As the modern economy spreads through the countryside, less people will die of tropical diseases or infected wounds. (*The New York Times*, May 12, 1997)
right	As the modern economy spreads through the countryside, fewer people will die of tropical diseases or infected wounds.
wrong	There are less steps, and that means there is more room for error.
right	There are fewer steps, and that means there is more room for error.

422. **lie** (meaning *speak falsely*): You lie *about* something, not *that* something.

wrong	He lied that he was eighteen years old.
right	He lied about his age, stating that he was eighteen.
or	He lied when he said he was eighteen years old.

423. **mistake**: Mistakes are *made* (not done).

wrong	He did seven mistakes in that short spelling exercise.
right	He made seven mistakes in that short spelling exercise.

424. **more/most**: Most adjectives and adverbs have comparative and superlative forms; the comparative is used when comparing two things, the superlative when comparing three or more.

needs checking	Smith was the most accomplished of the two.
revised	Smith was the more accomplished of the two.

To use *more* with a comparative adjective, or *most* with a superlative adjective is to repeat oneself.

wrong	The bride looked like the most happiest person in the world.
right	The bride looked like the happiest person in the world.
or	The bride looked like the most happy person in the world.
wrong	Gandalf is much more wiser than Frodo.
right	Gandalf is much wiser than Frodo.

425. **nor**: This word is usually used with *neither*. Do not use it with *not*; when using *not*, use *or* instead of *nor*.

wrong	She does not drink nor smoke.

right She does not drink or smoke.
or She neither drinks nor smokes.
wrong Graham does not have the money nor the organization to work with that Atkins enjoys.
right Graham does not have the money or the organization to work with that Atkins enjoys.
or Graham has neither the money nor the organization to work with that Atkins enjoys.

426. **nothing/nobody/nowhere**: These words should not be used with another negative word such as *not*. If one uses *not*, then one should use *anything* instead of *nothing*, *anybody* instead of *nobody, anywhere* instead of *nowhere*.

wrong He could not do nothing while he was in prison.
right He could not do anything while he was in prison.

427. **opposed**: You are opposed *to* something or someone (not with or against)

wrong Charles Darwin was opposed against the literal interpretation of the story of Creation, as found in Genesis.
right Charles Darwin was opposed to the literal interpretation of the story of Creation, as found in Genesis.

428. **per cent/percentage**: If you use *per cent*, you must give the number. Otherwise, use *percentage*.

wrong The per cent of people surveyed who reported any change of opinion was very small.
right The percentage of people surveyed who reported any change of opinion was very small.
or Only six per cent of the people surveyed reported any change of opinion.

Note: *Percentage* is always one word; authorities differ as to whether *per cent* should always be written as two words, or whether it also may be written as one word.

429. **preclude**: To *preclude* something is to exclude any possibility of it happening; people cannot be *precluded*.

wrong Our cash flow problems preclude us from entering into any new commitments before 2003.
right Our cash flow problems preclude any new commitments before 2003.

or We do not have enough money to make a commitment to you now.

430. **position/theory**: Positions and theories are held or argued; they do not hold or argue themselves.

wrong Devlin's position holds that a shared public morality is essential to the existence of society.
right Devlin's position is that a shared public morality is essential to the existence of society.
or Devlin holds that a shared public morality is essential to the existence of society.

431. **reason**: The phrase *the reason is because* involves repetition; use *that* instead of *because*, or eliminate the phrase completely.

wrong The reason ice floats is because it is lighter than water.
right The reason ice floats is that it is lighter than water.
or Ice floats because it is lighter than water.
wrong The reason I have come is because I want to apply for a job.
right I have come to apply for a job.

432. **short/scarce**: If a person is *short* of something, that thing is *scarce*.

wrong Food is now desperately short throughout the country.
right Food is now extremely scarce throughout the country.
or The country is now desperately short of food.

433. **since/for**: Both these words can be used to indicate length (or duration) of time, but they are used in slightly different ways. *Since* is used to mention the point at which a period of time began (*since 6 o'clock, since the beginning of 2002, since last Christmas,* etc.). *For* is used to mention the amount of time that has passed (*for two years, for six months, for centuries,* etc.).

wrong She has been staying with us since three weeks.
right She has been staying with us for three weeks.
or She has been staying with us since three weeks ago.

434. **so**: When used to show degree or extent, *so* is normally used with *that*: *so big that ... , so hungry that ... ,* etc. *So* should not be used as an intensifier in the way that *very* is used.

wrong When she stepped out of the church she looked so beautiful.
right When she stepped out of the church she looked very beautiful.
or When she stepped out of the church she looked so beautiful that it was hard to believe she had once been thought of as plain.

435. **some/any/someone/anyone**: With negatives (*not, never,* etc.) *any* is used in place of *some*.

wrong He never gives me some help with my work.
right He never gives me any help with my work.

436. **speech**: You *make* a speech or *give* a speech (not do a speech).

wrong The Dean was asked to do a speech at the Convocation.
right The Dean was asked to give a speech at the Convocation.

437. **start**: If both the time at which an event begins and the time that it finishes are mentioned, it is not enough to use only the verb *start*.

wrong The dance started from 9 p.m. till midnight.
right The dance started at 9 p.m. and finished at midnight.
or The dance continued from 9 p.m. until midnight.
or The dance lasted from 9 p.m. until midnight.

438. **suppose/supposed**: Be sure to add the *d* in the expression *supposed to.*

wrong We are suppose to be there by eight.
right We are supposed to be there by eight.

439. **supposed to/should**: These two are very similar in meaning, and may often be used interchangeably; if a person is *supposed to* do something, then that is what she *should* do. In the past tense, however, the question of when and when not to use *supposed to* is quite tricky. You may use it when you are clearly talking about a fixed plan that has not been carried out (e.g., *He was supposed to arrive before two o'clock, but he is still not here*). You should not use it to apply to any action that you think was wrong, or you feel should not have been carried out. The safe solution to this problem is always to use *should* instead of *supposed to.*

wrong What she said was impolite, but he was not supposed to hit her for saying it.

right What she said was impolite, but he should not have hit her for saying it.

wrong The National Party government was not supposed to keep Nelson Mandela in jail for so many years.

right The National Party government should not have kept Nelson Mandela in jail for so many years.

440. **thankful/grateful**: We are *thankful* that something has happened, and *grateful* for something we have received.

wrong I am very thankful for the kind thoughts expressed in your letter.

right I am very grateful for the kind thoughts expressed in your letter.

441. **too**: The word *too* suggests that something is more than necessary, or more than desired. Do not use it indiscriminately to lend emphasis.

wrong She looked too beautiful in her new dress.

right She looked very beautiful in her new dress.

442. **try/sure**: Perhaps the most common error of all, in published books and articles as well as in less formal writing, is the use of *and* rather than *to* after *try* and *sure*.

wrong No Montrealers stepped in to try and save the franchise.

right No Montrealers stepped in to try to save the franchise.

wrong Burton had agreed with the Sultan not to try and convert the Africans to Christianity. (Alan Moorehead, *The White Nile*)

right Burton had agreed with the Sultan not to try to convert the Africans to Christianity.

wrong Be sure and take out the garbage before you go to bed.

right Be sure to take out the garbage before you go to bed.

443. **use/used**: Be sure to add the *d* in the expression *used to.*

wrong He use to be much more reckless than he is now.

right He used to be much more reckless than he is now.

444. **where**: Do not use *where* for *that*.

wrong I read in the paper where the parties are now tied in popularity.

right I read in the paper that the parties are now tied in popularity.

PUTTING IDEAS TOGETHER

There are many ways of putting ideas together. Most of this chapter is concerned with the particulars of joining-words and how to use them; it may be useful, however, to begin with a brief look at some of the processes involved in putting ideas together.

Narration

The mode of thought involved in narratives is a very simple one: one thing happens, and then another thing happens, and then another thing happens. Narration is particularly useful in an academic context when the writer is describing the steps in a procedure, such as a scientific experiment. (Normally, the body of a lab report is largely taken up by narration, though the most important sections—outlining the hypothesis, drawing conclusions, etc.—are not written in a narrative mode.)

Narrative is the most straightforward mode of thinking and of writing, and perhaps for that reason many of us tend to overuse it. Business people, for example, are sometimes tempted to rely too much on narrative rather than analysis in writing reports. And among students there is a special temptation to employ the narrative mode in writing history or literature essays. In a few cases this may be appropriate. If the writer is discussing the Whitewater affair during the administration of Bill Clinton, for example, the narrative mode may well be the best one to adopt; the sequence is a complex one, and getting it straight is crucial to establishing the degrees of guilt (who knew what when) of those involved. But the narrative should be introduced in support of the writer's argument. It must not overwhelm the ideas.

Cause and Effect

A great deal of writing involves discerning and analyzing causes and effects. Whereas the natural connectives in narrative writing are *and* and *then,* the natural connectives in writing about causes and effects are words such as *because, since,* and *therefore*. These particular connectives—and how they relate to causes and effects—are treated fully below. But before turning to them it may be useful to under-

stand something of the difference between sequence and cause—between *and ... then* and *since ... therefore.*

sequences and causes: It is all too easy to confuse the fact that one thing happens after another thing with the notion that the first thing caused the second. Below, for example, are two arguments that were advanced against a provision in a piece of labour legislation introduced by a government in the year 2000 (I'll call it the government of Alpaca). This provision restricted the conditions under which employers would be permitted to hire outside workers during a strike. Both arguments drew comparisons with similar legislation that had been passed by another government (called here the government of Llama) some years earlier. Here is the first argument:

- This provision would lead to the closing of newspapers here in Alpaca, just as happened in Llama; the *Llama Star* suffered a long strike and was forced to close down after the introduction of similar legislation.

The facts in this argument are right. The legislation went into effect, and then the *Star* suffered from a strike, and subsequently closed down. But do they tell the whole story? Can we conclude from these facts that the first of these events was primarily or even partially responsible for causing the third? The era was a time of contraction in the newspaper business in Llama; at least one other newspaper in the area had closed down before this legislation went into effect. At the time, the population of newspaper-reading age was shrinking.

Let us look at the second argument:

- The provision will inevitably lead to an increase in the frequency and the duration of strikes. By 1998 in Llama, two years after similar legislation was introduced there, the number of days lost to strikes had increased over fifty per cent.

The facts are right here too; days lost to strikes *were* much higher in 1998 than in 1996. But again, can we assume that the first event caused the second? Hardly. First, we should look at other possible causes. For example, how was the overall economy performing in 1998 versus 1996? We should also look at other years as a basis for comparison; why should the year 1998 be singled out as a later point of comparison? Was it an unusually good or bad year for strikes? As it turns out, 1998 was indeed exceptional; there were far more strikes in that year than in most. On average, in the years since the controversial

legislation had been passed, the number and duration of strikes in Llama had actually decreased. Another lesson in the care that deserves to be taken in making—and in responding to—arguments about cause and effect.

multiple causes: Events often have more than one cause, and claims must often be justified by more than one reason. This sounds straightforward enough, but it is easy to forget, as the following examples show.

Many of the arguments against military intervention in the Persian Gulf (before the 1991 Gulf War, in 1998, and again in 2002–3) took this form:

- The Americans are willing to fight Saddam Hussein because they believe the oil reserves of the Gulf region are of strategic and economic importance to them. This is not a good moral justification for going to war. Therefore we should not fight.

To begin with, this sort of argument confuses explanation with justification. To inquire into American motives is to ask why the Americans were willing to go to war—a very different thing from asking if they should have been willing at those points to go to war. It is always possible to do "the right deed for the wrong reason."

Beyond this, however, the argument assumes that if one explanation can safely be advanced for an action, it is also safe to conclude that it is the only explanation. In fact, of course, it is entirely possible for the US and its allies to have been willing to go to war both out of a self-interested desire to protect oil reserves and out of unselfish desires to resist aggression, to prevent the development of chemical and biological weapons, and so on.

Reasoning used by many on the opposite side of such debates may be equally flawed. The gist of the argument of the American, British, and Canadian political leaders in 1991 was this:

- In an act of brutal aggression, Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait, killing many of its citizens in the process. Aggression must be resisted. Therefore we should be willing to go to war.

And in 1998, as well as in 2002–3:

- In a flagrant flouting of UN resolutions, Iraq has refused to allow monitoring of strategic sites on which it has probably been developing chemical and biological weapons. Contempt for international law must be resisted. Therefore we should be willing to go to war.

As with the anti-war arguments above, the pro-war arguments here suffer from incomplete reasoning—reasoning that fails to allow for any multiplicity of causes, reasons, and effects. Did Iraq in 1991 have a legitimate historical claim on the territory of Kuwait (which, like Iraq, was carved out of what had been a part of the Ottoman Empire by the British)? What are the casualties likely to be in the event of war? Should aggression be resisted in all circumstances, and at any cost? These are some of the questions left unanswered.

And similarly in 1998 and 2002–3: Should defiance of UN resolutions be resisted at any cost? Who is likely to suffer, and how much? Does military intervention carry with it the risk of sparking a larger conflict? Have other means short of military action been exhausted? Depending on the answers one provides to such questions, the appropriate course of action may become far less clear.

necessary and sufficient conditions: A useful distinction to use in sorting out the relative importance of multiple causes, effects, and reasons is the one between necessary and sufficient conditions. The presence of oxygen is a necessary condition for there to be fire; there can be no fire without oxygen. But it is not a sufficient condition; everything in the presence of oxygen does not automatically catch fire.

Similarly (in the argument discussed above), the 1991 political leaders were in effect arguing that the fact of Iraq having invaded and annexed another sovereign country was in itself a sufficient condition to justify going to war. Someone arguing against going to war in the same circumstances might claim that the invasion of one country by another was a necessary condition for going to war, but not a sufficient one—that other, additional justification was required. And a third person might say that the invasion constituted neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition; that we should stay out of such affairs in any circumstances.

cause and correlation: Another useful distinction—particularly in the sciences and social sciences—is that between cause and correlation. Again, this may be made clear by example. A recent study has shown that the rate of breast cancer in women has increased markedly over the past twenty years. Over the same period, the average childbearing age has also risen dramatically. Now it is possible that the connection between those two occurrences may be causal in nature—that, for example, waiting until later in life to have children increases one's risk of breast cancer. But researchers caution that we should not assume this to be the case; more research needs to be done. As it

stands, the connection is merely a correlation: an interrelationship of variable qualities. In this case, over the same period and under the same conditions, both variables changed.

When a correlation between two things exists, there may be a common cause or common causes for both; one may cause the other (or help to cause the other; again, more than one cause may be involved); the two may happen coincidentally as a result of quite separate causes.

Arguing in English

It is widely accepted that problems with writing are often closely intertwined with a lack of training in thinking critically; for that reason coverage of some basic concepts in critical thinking is included here. Of course thousands of books have been written on critical thinking and logical argument—and on the subtleties of logical argument in English. In a book of this sort it is not possible to do more than touch on a few key distinctions.

deductive/inductive: The conclusion of a deductive argument is based on its premises, and the conclusion must follow logically from the premises if the argument is sound. The classic examples of deductive arguments are syllogisms such as the following:

- A successful baseball team must have good starting pitchers to succeed. This year's White Sox team does not have good starting pitching. Therefore, this year's White Sox team will not be successful.

Note that the reasoning of a deductive argument may be sound even if one of its premises are false. For example, the above syllogism makes a valid argument in terms of its reasoning regardless of whether or not it is in fact true that to be successful a team must have good starting pitching.

Inductive arguments, on the other hand, rest on factual evidence; typically they generalize from a particular number or percentage to a general conclusion. Here is an example:

- Since the creation of the National League, every World Series winner has had at least three outstanding starting pitchers on its roster. It seems reasonable to conclude from this that the chances of a team with fewer than three outstanding starting pitchers winning the World Series are extremely slight.

From this observation it seems safe to generalize that a team needs

outstanding starting pitchers if it is to succeed. Notice that inductive arguments are based on numbers, percentages, and estimates of probabilities.

In practice arguments very frequently combine inductive and deductive elements. Here is another example:

- Nobody ever dies from this sort of operation. If Frank dies during the operation, then it must be as a result of malpractice on the part of the surgeons. We should sue!

The initial claim here involves an inductive claim. It can be settled only by reference to the facts:

- What percentage of people have in fact died during this sort of operation?

The follow-up claim represents a deductive argument, and can be addressed by reasoning, without reference to the facts of the case:

- If it is indeed true that others have not died during this sort of operation, then what are the possible explanations? Is it in fact true that the only possible explanation is medical malpractice?

some/all: It is particularly important in sorting out both inductive and deductive arguments to be sensitive to the difference between *some* and *all*. This may seem an obvious point, but it is one that it is easy to lose in the twists and turns of an argument—or indeed in making off-hand observations about things that seem self-evident:

- I don't know about that candidate. We've hired people from that school before and, to be honest, they really haven't worked out. Let's look again at the other candidates.

The implicit assumption here is of course that since *some* graduates of a particular school have not worked out, it follows that *all* graduates of the same school will not work out at this particular sort of job.

The distinction between *some* and *all* should also be kept in mind when it comes to arguments with several interconnected strands. Does what one is saying apply to all the facts of the argument, or only to some of them? Here is an example:

- What on earth is wrong with *spinster*, *chairman*, *mankind*, or, for that matter, adjectives such as *blind* and *deaf*, to name just a few? These are perfectly legitimate and serviceable terms, yet an arbitrary,

> malevolent connotation has been assigned them. In their place we are asked to draw from a silly artificial glossary of convoluted euphemisms to describe people and events, a glossary replete with all manner of adverbs with the word *challenged* suffixed leech-like to them.

The writer here is arguing against bias-free language. The core of the argument is that the new terms we are asked to use are silly, artificial, and convoluted. And that may well be true of a term such as *mentally challenged*. But notice how difficult it is to make such claims stick with all or even most of the examples here. The non-sexist alternatives for *chairman* and *mankind—chair*, *humanity*, and the like—are hardly silly, artificial, or convoluted. And are we in fact asked to replace the word *deaf* with *aurally-challenged*? Not at all. Those working in the field do indeed use *aurally-challenged* as a blanket term to refer to all those who have any hearing impairment, ranging from mild loss of hearing to complete deafness, but they do not shy away from using terms such as *deaf* and *partially deaf*. In short, the objection raised by this writer to "politically correct" language in general turns out to apply only to a very few instances.

if/then: The *if …then* syntactical structure is a basic form of both deductive and inductive arguments. It may be helpful here to look out for necessary and sufficient conditions; these are discussed above under the section on Cause and Effect.

trends: In matters of any complexity involving numbers and trends, it is easy to lose sight of the big picture—and many verbal arguments are constructed in a way that encourages those listening to the arguments to lose sight of the big picture. Here is an example:

- Even many of those who support the Kyoto protocol say that it will cost jobs—perhaps hundreds of thousands of jobs. We cannot afford to let our economy shrink; it is essential that we oppose ratification of the Kyoto accord.

The unstated premise in this argument is that if jobs are lost, the economy shrinks. That might be the case if what were being spoken of was an absolute reduction in the number of jobs. In fact, however, no discussion of the issue has suggested that this would happen. Some have suggested that the total number of jobs and the economy in general would grow somewhat more slowly if the Kyoto protocol were adopted, whereas others have suggested that the economy would grow almost as fast or just as fast if the accord were adopted. Here, as in

many other cases, it is important to be aware of distinctions between a decline, and a decline in the rate of increase, and so on.

relevance: It is often much more difficult than one would think to judge what is relevant or irrelevant to a given argument. Here is an example:

- I don't agree with the arguments of the animal rights activists. Before we worry about any troubles the animals might have, we should take care of the problems that people have.

The argument here may seem at first glance quite powerful, but in fact the claims being made are entirely irrelevant to all but one of the arguments put forward by animal rights activists. The argument here says nothing as to the inductive claims made by these activists about the prevalence of cruelty to animals in factory farming, for example, and nor does it address the argument that it is wrong to cause unnecessary pain to other creatures. The only argument that it does address is the suggestion that we should pay some attention to the plight of animals even while we are also attempting to address human problems. There are no doubt legitimate arguments of a variety of sorts to be made concerning the priority we should give to the plight of animals as against that of humans who are suffering. But that is a separate question from the one that this argument purports to be addressing.

fallacies: A fallacious argument is one that suffers from faulty reasoning. Many forms of faulty reasoning have been identified; following is a list of some of the most common forms of fallacy:

ad hominem: This is the fallacy of attacking the person making the argument rather than the argument itself. Here is an example:

- What George Bush says about energy policy makes no sense at all. Remember, he made a fortune in the oil industry.

straw man argument: A common practice in argument is to ascribe to one's opponent an extreme view that in fact one's opponent has never put forward, and then suggest that in knocking down the extreme "straw man" argument you have won. Here are two examples:

- I fully support capital punishment. How can anyone claim that the life of a convicted murderer is as valuable as the life of the innocent person he has killed?

- I oppose capital punishment. How can anyone claim that there is no chance of a criminal reforming, and no intrinsic value in human life itself?

Of course, neither the opponents nor the supporters of capital punishment make the suggested claims—but often people are able to get away with this sort of sleight of hand in the midst of an argument.

begging the question: To beg the question is to avoid the question by taking for granted the very thing to be argued about. Here is an example**:**

- The situation in Afghanistan remains turbulent, and in this context it is vital that we support good government in surrounding countries. How, then, should we best support the current government in Pakistan?

By moving straight to asking how best to support the current government of Pakistan, the arguer here avoids (or "begs") the question of whether or not the current government of Pakistan is indeed providing good government that is deserving of support. (For common misunderstanding of *beg the question* to mean *raise the question*, see above, page 80.)

formally invalid arguments: If the formal structure of one's argument is not sound, then the argument is fallacious.

Two common forms of formally invalid arguments are those which *deny the antecedent*, and those which *affirm the consequent*. Here is an example of the former:

- If water starts dripping from this ceiling during a rainstorm, then you can be sure there is a problem with your roof. No water drips from the ceiling during a rainstorm. Therefore, there is no problem with the roof.

In this case it is certainly true that water dripping from the ceiling is a reliable sign of there being some problem with the roof. But of course there can be a problem with the roof even without there being such a visible sign; very frequently roof leaks result in water saturating rafters and seeping down inside walls without there being any drips from the ceiling. (Like so many elements of reasoning, the ability to recognize this fallacy connects to the ability to be sensitive to the distinction between *some* and *all*; some roof leaks result in dripping

ceilings, but others don't.) The *if* … part of an argument such as this is known as the *antecedent*. And, as the example above shows, denying the antecedent has no argumentative force.

- If a lake is very seriously affected by acid rain, no fish can survive in it. This lake has no fish living in it whatsoever. This lake must be seriously affected by acid rain.

It is entirely true that lakes seriously affected by acid rain cannot support any aquatic life. But that is not the only possible cause for the disappearance of aquatic life from a lake. If, for example, a company had been using the lake as a toxic waste dump, that would also have the effect of killing all the fish. (Again, the distinction between *some* and *all* is crucial; some lifeless lakes got that way because of acid rain, but not all.) The *then* … part of an argument is called the *consequent*. As this example shows, affirming the consequent does nothing to prove the argument.

slippery slope arguments: The fallacy of the slippery slope argument is the suggestion that one development in a certain direction will inevitably lead to further developments in the same direction or "down the same slope." Here is an example:

- The idea of people being required to carry identity cards may seem innocuous enough, but in fact it should be resolutely opposed. If we allow the government to force us to carry identity cards, pretty soon they'll be keeping track of all our movements with video cameras, and placing all sorts of restrictions on our privacy. We have to stop these government intrusions into our lives!

This argument says nothing about the issue of identity cards *per se*. It is entirely based on the premise of one move by the government being followed by other, more drastic moves. Sometimes, of course, developments are part of long-term trends, but sometimes they are not part of any trend—or may represent the furthest extent of a particular trend. Certainly there is no inevitability about any particular move in one direction being followed by subsequent moves in the same direction.

false dichotomy: A dichotomy occurs when things or ideas are split into two distinct alternatives. An argument that tries to insist on two and only two alternatives when in fact three or more possibilities exist (or gradations among possibilities exist) is one that poses a *false dichotomy*. Here is an example:

"There should be laws prohibiting people from inciting hate against those of other races or religions."

"So you're against freedom of speech? Without freedom of speech we wouldn't have a democracy!"

"No, I support freedom of speech—but with certain limits to prevent the most harmful extreme views from being promulgated. It sounds to me as if you are not willing to do anything to combat bigotry and racism."

"Not at all. But I believe that people speaking out freely against freely expressed bigoted or racist opinions will combat them more effectively than government attempts to prohibit them."

In this case both arguers pose false dichotomies in their characterizations of the other's viewpoint—whereas in fact both hold nuanced views.

missing or unacknowledged premises: Many real-life arguments take short cuts and do not spell out all the underlying premises. In many cases this does not in fact damage the argument, but sometimes a missing or unacknowledged premise is the key to a fatal weakness in an argument. Here is an example:

- Many have suggested that the presence of extreme poverty and oppression in the world makes it more likely that terrorism will take root. But that just doesn't square with the facts; the vast majority of the September 11th terrorists and the Al Qaeda leadership did not come from backgrounds of extreme hardship. Some, including Osama bin Laden, were among the most privileged members of Saudi Arabian society.

The missing or unacknowledged premise in this argument is that people will always struggle only on behalf of those from their own nationality or social class. In fact, however, history is filled with examples of individuals from one nation or social class who became so involved with the plight of another that they devote all their energies to fighting for change.

An example like this illustrates just how readily our perceptions of argument are influenced by emotion and ideology. In this case, the entirely appropriate sense of anger and revulsion that we feel at the terrorist acts makes it difficult for us to imagine that the terrorists might consider themselves to be acting altruistically on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. And maybe most of them do not in fact think of themselves in this way. The only point here is that the fact of someone coming from a privileged background does not in itself preclude

the possibility that such a person will act in a way he or she perceives as benefiting the less privileged.

post hoc, propter hoc: The fallacy here is to imagine that if one thing happens after the other, then it will have happened because of the other. (The Latin *post hoc, propter hoc* translates as *after this*, *because of this*.) Here is an example:

- The decline of frog populations throughout the world started to happen just after the thinning of the ozone layer; there *has* to be a connection!

But there doesn't have to be a connection—as becomes plain if we substitute a different event in the same logical structure:

- The decline of frog populations throughout the world started to happen just after the Montreal Canadiens stopped winning the Stanley Cup with any degree of frequency; there *has* to be a connection!

In this case damage from ultraviolet radiation is indeed one possible cause for the decline of frog populations—but scientists are still weighing the evidence, and are far from certain if it is one of several contributing causes, the primary cause, or simply an unrelated event. (For more on this sort of problem in reasoning, see under Cause and Effect.)

Joining Words

The art of combining correct clauses and sentences logically and coherently is as much dependent on taking the time to think through what we are writing—and how the reader will respond to what we write—as it is on knowledge of correct usage. It is all too easy for most of us to assume that the flow of our thoughts will be as clear to the reader as it is to us. In practical terms this leads to the omission of links in the argument or of joining words that help the reader to see those links. Almost as common is the tendency to give too many or contradictory cues to the reader—a tendency that is often an indication that ideas have not yet been thoroughly thought out. That in itself is nothing to be ashamed of; the key is to be willing to take the time to re-read and revise the work. Every good writer makes at least two and sometimes as many as five or six drafts of any piece of writing before considering it finished. Here are two examples, both taken from early drafts of books published by Broadview Press:

- At the end of World War II there was substantial optimism that the application of Keynesian analysis would lead to economic stability and security. Over the post-war period optimistic rationalism weakened in the face of reality.
- A short report in which you request an increase in your department's budget should be written in the persuasive mode. Most reports, however, do not have persuasion as their main objective. Persuasion, though, will often be one of their secondary objectives. In reports like these, some parts will be written in the persuasive mode.

445. **too few cues** (see also *non sequitur*): The first of these passages gives the reader too few cues. What is the connection between the idea of the first sentence and that of the second? One can figure it out without too much difficulty, but the flow of the argument is briefly interrupted while one does so. The problem is easily solved by the addition of one word to the second sentence:

right At the end of World War II there was substantial optimism that the application of Keynesian analysis would lead to economic stability and security. Over the post-war period, however, optimistic rationalism weakened in the face of reality.

446. **too many or contradictory cues**: The second passage suffers from the opposite problem; the use of *however* and *though* in consecutive sentences gives the reader the sense of twisting back on himself without any clear sense of direction. This sort of difficulty can be removed by rewording or rearranging the ideas:

right A short report in which you request an increase in your department's budget should be written in the persuasive mode. Most reports, however, do not have persuasion as their main objective. Persuasion will thus be at most a secondary objective. In reports like these, some parts will be written in the persuasive mode.

The following pages list the chief words and expressions used in English to join ideas together, and discuss problems that are often experienced with them.

Words to Connect Ideas That Are Opposed to Each Other

All these words are used to indicate that the writer is saying two things which seem to go against each other, or are different from each other.

For example, in the sentence, *He is very rich, but he is not very happy,* the fact that he is not happy is the reverse of what we might expect of a rich man. The word *but* indicates this opposition of ideas to the reader.

although	nevertheless
but	though
despite	whereas
even if	while
however	yet
in spite of	

Although

This word indicates that in the same sentence two things that seem to go against each other are being said. *Although* is usually used to introduce subordinate clauses, not phrases.

- Although he has short legs, he can run very quickly.
- Hume and Dr. Johnson, indeed, have a good deal in common, although Hume's attitude towards religion earned him Johnson's scorn.

447. **although/but**: Be careful not to use both *although* and *but* in the same sentence; one is enough:

wrong Although in many African countries the government is not elected by the people, but in Botswana the government is democratically elected.

right Although in many African countries the government is not elected by the people, in Botswana the government is democratically elected.

or In most African countries the government is not elected by the people, but in Zimbabwe the government is democratically elected.

But

This word is usually used in the middle of a sentence to show that the two ideas in the sentence oppose or seem to oppose each other. It is also quite correct, however, to use *but* at the beginning of a sentence, if what one is saying in the sentence forms a complete clause and if the idea of the sentence seems to oppose the idea of the previous sentence.

e.g. The civilization of ancient Greece produced some of the world's greatest works of art and gave birth to the idea of democracy, but the Greeks also believed in slavery.

or The civilization of Greece produced some of the world's greatest works of art and gave birth to the idea of democracy. But the Greeks also believed in slavery.

448. **opposing or supporting ideas**: When one is dealing with complex combinations of ideas it is sometimes easy to forget which ideas are in fact in opposition and which in support.

wrong Brandy and bourbon, with the most "congenors," have the highest hangover ratings. Red wine is a close second, followed by dark rum, sherry, scotch, rye, beer, white wine, gin, and vodka. Vintage red wines have 15 times as much histamine (it triggers allergic reactions) as white wine, but vintage whites have fewer congenors.

(The use of *but* is inappropriate here; that whites have both less histamine and fewer congenors is as one would expect; the two facts are both instances of white wines having fewer side effects than reds.)

right Brandy and bourbon, with the most "congenors," have the highest hangover ratings. Red wine is a close second, followed by dark rum, sherry, scotch, rye, beer, white wine, gin, and vodka. Vintage red wines also have 15 times as much histamine (it triggers allergic reactions) as white wine does.

449. **but**: Experienced writers are careful not to use *but* more than once in a single sentence, or in consecutive sentences; they realize that doing so tends to confuse the reader. (It is also unwise to use any combination of *but* and *however* in this way.)

wrong Chief Constable Smith said that Ryan had been legally in possession of three handguns and two rifles, but he thought it "incredible" that someone should be allowed to keep ammunition at his home. But he said any change in the firearms law was something which would not be discussed by him.

right Chief Constable Smith said that Ryan had been legally in possession of three handguns and two rifles. Smith said he thought it "incredible" that someone should be allowed to keep ammunition at his home, but he would not comment directly on whether there should be a change in the firearms law.

Despite

This word means the same as *although*, but it is used to introduce phrases, not clauses.

- Despite his old age, his mind is active and alert.
  (*Despite his old age* is a phrase; it has no verb.)
- Although he is very old, his mind is active and alert.
  (*Although he is very old* is a clause, with *he* as a subject and *is* as a verb.)
- Despite the rain, she wanted to go out to the park.
- Although it was raining hard, she wanted to go to the park.

450. **despite**: Remember not to introduce clauses with *despite*.

wrong	Despite that the drink tasted very strong, there was very little alcohol in it.
right	Despite its strong taste, there was very little alcohol in the drink.
or	Although the drink tasted very strong, there was very little alcohol in it.

Even if

This expression is used when one is introducing a clause giving a condition. The word *even* emphasizes that the condition is surprising or unusual. Examples:

- Even if I have to stay up all night, I am determined to finish the job.
  (Staying up all night would be very unusual.)
- Even if Bangladesh doubled its food production, some of its people would still be hungry.
  (Doubling its food production would be very surprising.)

However

This word shows that what one is saying seems to go against what one has said in the previous sentence. It should normally be placed between commas in the middle of the sentence:

- The country suffered greatly during the three-year drought. This year, however, the rains have been heavy.

451. **however**: *However* should not be used to combine ideas within one sentence, unless a semi-colon is used.

wrong	Hitler attempted to conquer the Soviet Union however he was defeated.
right	Hitler attempted to conquer the Soviet Union; however, he was defeated.
or	Hitler attempted to conquer the Soviet Union. However, he was defeated.

or Hitler attempted to conquer the Soviet Union but he was defeated.

wrong There will not be regular mail pick-up from boxes this Friday, however regular mail pick-up will resume Saturday.

right There will not be regular mail pick-up from boxes this Friday, but regular mail pick-up will resume Saturday.

or There will not be regular mail pick-up from boxes this Friday. However, regular mail pick-up will resume Saturday.

(Note that *however* in the sense of *to whatever extent* may be used to introduce a clause: *However tired we are, we must finish the job tonight*.)

Nevertheless

Like *however, nevertheless* is normally used to show that the idea of one sentence seems to go against the idea of the previous sentence. It should not be used to join two clauses into one sentence. Example:

- According to the known laws of physics it is not possible to walk on water. Nevertheless, this is what the Bible claims Jesus did.

Whereas

This word is commonly used when one is comparing two things and showing how they differ. Like *although*, it must begin a subordinate clause, and may be used either at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence.

e.g. Whereas Americans are usually thought of as being loud and confident, Canadians tend to be more quiet and less sure of themselves.

or Americans are usually thought of as being loud and confident, whereas Canadians tend to be more quiet and less sure of themselves.

452. **whereas**: Any sentence that uses *whereas* must have at least two clauses—a subordinate clause beginning with *whereas* and a main clause.

wrong In "The Rain Horse" a young person feels unhappy when he returns to his old home. Whereas in "The Ice Palace" a young person feels unhappy when she leaves home for the first time.

right In "The Rain Horse" a young person feels unhappy when he returns to his old home, whereas in "The Ice Palace" a young person feels unhappy when she leaves home for the first time.

While

453. **while**: *While* can be used in the same way as *although*. If there is any chance of confusion with the other meanings of *while*, however, it is better to use *although* in such circumstances.

wrong While I support free trade in principle, I think it hurts this industry.

right Although I support free trade in principle, I think it hurts this industry.

Yet

This word can be used either to refer to time (e.g., *He is not yet here*), or to connect ideas in opposition to each other. When used in this second way, it may introduce another word or a phrase, or a completely new sentence.

- His spear was firm, yet flexible.
- Barthes decries the language of "realism"—the pretense that one can represent on the page life as it really is. Yet it is difficult to see how following his prescriptions for an art of signs that "draw attention to their own arbitrariness" can entirely escape a tendency towards art that calls too much attention to its own surface, even art that is self-indulgent.

454. **yet**: *Yet*, like the other words in this group, should not be paired with another conjunction in such a way as to create too many twists and turns in the argument.

wrong Varying the pace, altering the tone, director Joseph Rubens keeps us off balance. Ultimately, though, that pedestrian script catches up with him, yet not before *Sleeping with the Enemy* has made its point.

(The combination of *yet* and *though* is confusing for the reader.)

right Varying the pace, altering the tone, director Joseph Rubens keeps us off balance. Ultimately, that pedestrian script catches up with him, yet not before *Sleeping with the Enemy* has made its point.

Words to Join Linked or Supporting Ideas

also	indeed
and	in fact
as well	moreover

further	similarly
furthermore	: [colon]
in addition	; [semi-colon]
not only ... but also	

Also, as well

These two are very similar both in meaning and in the way that they are used. It is best not to use *also* to start sentences or paragraphs. Examples:

- He put forward his simplistic credo with enormous conviction. "To do well at school," he assured us, "you must be willing to study. It is also important to eat the right foods, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep." While the one thing we all wanted, and none of us had managed to get, was plenty of sex.
- He put forward his simplistic credo with enormous conviction. "To do well at school," he assured us, "you must be willing to study. It is important as well to eat the right foods, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep." While the one thing we all wanted, and none of us had managed to get, was plenty of sex.

455. **also**: *Also* should not be used in the way that we often use *and*—to join two clauses together into one sentence.

wrong	We performed the experiment with the beaker half full also we repeated it with the beaker empty.
right	We performed the experiment with the beaker half full and we repeated it with the beaker empty.
or	We performed the experiment with the beaker half full. We also repeated it with the beaker empty.

And

456. **and**: If this word appears more than once in the same sentence, it's worth stopping to ask if it would not be better to start a new sentence. Usually the answer will be yes.

wrong	All my family attended the celebration and most of my friends were there and we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly.
right	All my family attended the celebration and most of my friends were there too. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly.

457. **as ... as**: When making comparisons one may use the *as ... as* combination or use a comparative adjective with *than*. But the two should not be combined.

wrong Recent studies indicate that the average smoker is three times as likely to develop cancer than his non-smoking counterpart.

right Recent studies indicate that the average smoker is three times more likely to develop cancer than his non-smoking counterpart.

458. **as well**: To avoid repetition, do not use *as well* in combination with *both*.

wrong This method should be rejected, both because it is very expensive as well as because it is inefficient.

right This method should be rejected, both because it is very expensive and because it is inefficient.

In addition, further, furthermore, moreover

All of these are commonly used to show that what the writer is saying gives additional support to an earlier statement she has made. An example:

- It is easy to see why many countries still trade with South Africa, despite their intense dislike of apartheid. For one thing, it is the richest country in Africa. Many of its resources, moreover, are of strategic importance.

Notice that all four expressions are often used after sentences that begin with words such as *for one thing* or *first*.

Indeed, in fact

Both of these are used to indicate that what the writer is saying is a restatement or elaboration of the idea he has expressed in the previous sentence. Notice that a colon or semi-colon may also be used to show this. Examples:

- Asia is the world's most populous continent. In fact, more people live there than in all the other continents combined.
- Asia is the world's most populous continent: more people live there than in all the other continents combined.

Not only ... but also

459. **not only ... but also**: This combination is used to join two pieces of supporting evidence in an argument. The combination can

help to create balanced, rhythmic writing, but if it is to do so it must be used carefully. Notice that it is not necessary to use *but also* in all cases, but that if the phrase is omitted a semi-colon is normally required in order to avoid a run-on sentence.

wrong Not only was Nirvana a commercial success, it was also among the first grunge bands to achieve musical respectability.

right Not only was Nirvana a commercial success; it was also among the first grunge bands to achieve musical respectability.

or Nirvana was not only a commercial success, but also a critical one; it was among the first grunge bands to achieve musical respectability.

Plus

460. **plus**: Do not use this word in the same way as *and* or *as well*.

wrong For one thing, the Council did not much like the design for the proposed new City Hall. Plus, there was not enough money available to build it that year.

right For one thing, the Council did not much like the design for the proposed new City Hall. As well, there was not enough money available to build it that year.

Words Used to Introduce Causes or Reasons

The core of most arguments involves reasons why the writer's statements can be claimed to be true, and relationships of cause and effect. It is common to experience some difficulty at first in understanding such relationships clearly. The discussion below of the word *because* may be helpful in this respect. To begin with, though, here is a list of words that are used to introduce causes or reasons:

as
for
as a result of
on account of
because
since
due to

As

This word can be used either to show the relationship between two events in time, or to indicate that one event is the cause of another.

This sometimes leaves room for confusion about meaning (ambiguity). The following sentence is a good example:

- As he was riding on the wrong side of the road, he was hit by a car.

This can mean either *When he was riding on the wrong side of the road ...* or *Because he was riding on the wrong side of the road ....* Unless the writer is absolutely certain that the meaning is clear, it may be better to use *while* or *when* instead of *as* to indicate relationships in time, and *because* instead of *as* to indicate relationships of cause and effect.

Because

This word creates many problems for writers. The first thing to remember is that any group of words introduced with *because* must state a cause or reason. It must not state a result or an example.

461. **because**: In the following sentences, *because* has been wrongly used:

wrong The wind was blowing because the leaves were moving to and fro.

wrong He had been struck by a car because he lay bleeding in the road.

A moment's reflection leads to the realization that both of these sentences are the wrong way round. The movement of the leaves is the result of the blowing of the wind, and the man's bleeding is the result of his having been hit. When the sentences are turned around, they become correct:

right The leaves were moving to and fro because the wind was blowing.

right He lay bleeding on the road because he had been struck by a car.

What leads many people to make mistakes like these is the sort of question that begins, *How do you know that ...* or *Prove that ...* or *Show that ....* The person who is asked, "How do you know that the wind is blowing?" is likely to answer wrongly, "The wind is blowing because the leaves are moving to and fro." What he really means is, "I know the wind is blowing because I see the leaves moving to and fro." That answer is quite correct, since here the seeing is the cause of the

knowing. Similarly, someone who is asked to show that the man in a newspaper story has been hit by a car might answer wrongly, "He had been struck by a car because he lay bleeding in the road." What he really means is, "I know that he had been struck by a car because I read that he lay bleeding in the road." It is of course awkward to use a lot of phrases such as *I know that* and *I see that*. Here are some easier and better ways of answering such questions:

- The movement of the trees shows that the wind is blowing.
- The fact that the leaves are moving proves that the wind is blowing.
- Since the man lay bleeding in the road, it seems likely that he had been hit by a car.

462. **because**: *Because* is also often used incorrectly to introduce examples.

Look carefully at the following sentences:

wrong The Suharto regime detained people in jail for long periods without ever bringing them to trial because it had little respect for the law.

wrong In the story, "The Hero," Dora feels sorry for Julius because she sheds tears when he is expelled from school.

In these sentences the source of confusion may not be immediately clear. If we ask ourselves whether the regime's actions caused it to have little respect for the law, however, we realize that the answer is no. Are Dora's tears a cause of her feeling sorry for Julius? Again, no. It may be a result of her feeling sorry, or an example chosen to show that she felt sorry, but it is certainly not a cause. Again, it is possible to correct these sentences as we did the ones above—by reversing the order of the ideas. But this may not always be an appropriate solution to the problem, particularly if what the writer is trying to show is an example or an illustration rather than a relationship of cause and effect. If, for example, one had been asked, "How do you know that Dora feels sorry for Julius?" or told to "Show that the Suharto regime had little respect for the law," one would not normally want to answer using *because*. Here are various ways of dealing with such difficulties:

- Dora feels sorry for Julius when he is expelled, as we can see when she sheds tears for him.
- It is clear that Dora feels sorry for Julius, since she sheds tears for him.

- We can see from the fact that Dora sheds tears for Julius that she feels sorry for him.
- The fact that the Suharto regime in Indonesia detained people for long periods without ever bringing them to trial shows that it had little respect for the law.
- The Suharto regime in Indonesia showed little respect for the law. It detained people for long periods, for example, without ever bringing them to trial.
- The Suharto regime in Indonesia had little respect for the law; it detained people for long periods without ever bringing them to trial.

Of all these examples the last is perhaps the best, since it is the most succinct.

463. **because**: It is best not to use *because* when listing several reasons for something; otherwise the writer gives the reader the impression that the first reason given is to be the only reason. The reader will then be surprised when others are mentioned.

wrong He was happy because it was Friday. He was also happy because his team had won the game that morning and he had scored the winning goal. Finally, he was happy because he had done well on his exams.

right He was happy for several reasons: it was Friday, he had scored the winning goal for his team that morning. and he had done well on his exams.

wrong Frederick was able to enjoy such success because he was enormously adroit at waiting for the right opportunity, and seizing it when it was handed him. He was also successful because he created a military machine that had no equal.

right One reason Frederick was able to enjoy such success was that he was enormously adroit at waiting for the right opportunity, and seizing it when it was handed him. But none of this would have been possible had he not also created a military machine that had no equal.

464. **because**: Some people like to answer *How ...?* questions by using *because*. Instead, the word *by* should be used.

wrong How did she help him? She helped him because she lent him some money.

right How did she help him? She helped him by lending him some money.

Due to

465. **due to**: *Due* is an adjective and therefore should always modify a noun (as in the common phrase *with all due respect*). When followed

by *to* it can suggest a causal relationship, but remember that the word *due* must in that case refer to the previous noun:

e.g. The team's success is due to hard work.
(*Due* refers to the noun *success*.)

It is not a good idea to begin a sentence with a phrase such as *Due to unexpected circumstances ...* or *Due to the fact that ....* To avoid such difficulties it is best to use *because*.

wrong Due to the departure of our Sales Manager, the Marketing Director will take on additional responsibility for a short time.

right Because our Sales Manager has resigned suddenly, the Marketing Director will take on additional responsibility for a short time.

Since

When used to introduce causes or reasons (rather than as a time word) *since* is used in essentially the same way as *because*.

Words Used to Introduce Results or Conclusions

as a result	therefore
consequently	thus
hence	to sum up
in conclusion	in consequence
it follows that ...	so, and so

As a result, hence

Both of these are used to show that the idea being talked about in one sentence follows from, or is the result of, what was spoken of in the previous sentence.

e.g. His car ran out of gas. As a result, he was late for his appointment.

or His car ran out of gas. Hence, he was late for his appointment.

Notice the difference between these two and words such as *because* and *since*; we would say *Because (or since) his car ran out of gas, he was late for the appointment.*

466. **hence**: *Hence* should not be used to join two clauses into one sentence, or to join words or phrases.

wrong Her phone is out of order hence it will be impossible to contact her.
right Her phone is out of order. Hence, it will be impossible to contact her.
wrong It is not the film but the advertising that is exploitative, hence pornographic.
right It is not the film but the advertising that is exploitative, and hence pornographic.

So

This word may be used to introduce results when one wants to mention both cause and result in the same sentence (e.g., *Her phone is out of order, so it will be impossible to contact her*). It is usually best not to use *so* to begin a sentence, in order to avoid writing sentence fragments.

467. **so**. If *so* is used, *because* is not needed, and vice versa. One of the two is enough.

wrong Because he was tired, so he went to bed early.
right Because he was tired, he went to bed early.
or He was tired, so he went to bed early.

Therefore

468. **therefore**: *Therefore* should not be used to join two clauses into one sentence.

wrong Training is perceived as good, therefore the payment of a $30 million subsidy to McDonalds can be made to look like a benign act.
right Training is perceived as good; therefore the payment of a $30 million subsidy to McDonalds can be made to look like a benign act.

Words Used to Express Purpose

in order to	so that
in such a way as to	so as to

So that

469. **so that**: When used beside each other (see also *so ... that* below) these two words show purpose; they indicate that we will be told why an action was taken. Examples:

- He sent the parcel early so that it would arrive before Christmas.
- She wants to see you so that she can ask you a question.

The words *such that* should never be used in this way to indicate purpose.

wrong	The doctor will give you some medicine such that you will be cured.
right	The doctor will give you some medicine so that you will be cured.
wrong	Fold the paper such that it forms a triangle.
right	Fold the paper so that it forms a triangle.
or	Fold the paper in such a way that it forms a triangle.

Words Used to Introduce Examples

for example	such as
for instance	: [colon]
in that	

For example, for instance, such as

The three expressions are used differently, even though they all introduce examples. *Such as* is used to introduce a single word or short phrase. It always relates to a plural noun that has appeared just before it.

- Crops such as tea and rice require a great deal of water.
  (Here *such as* relates to the noun *crops*.)
- Several African peoples, such as the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Makonde of Tanzania, attach a special ceremonial importance to masks.
  (*Such as* relates to *peoples*.)

For example and *for instance*, on the other hand, are complete phrases in themselves, and are normally set off by commas. Each is used to show that the entire sentence in which it appears gives an example of a statement made in the previous sentence. Examples:

- Some crops require a great deal of water. Tea, for example, requires an annual rainfall of at least 1500 mm.
- Several African peoples attach a special ceremonial importance to masks. The Yoruba and the Makonde, for example, both believe that spirits enter the bodies of those who wear certain masks.

- Tornadoes are not only a Deep South phenomenon. In 1987, for instance, over 20 people were killed by a tornado in Edmonton, Alberta.

470. **for example, for instance**: *For example* and *for instance* should not be used to introduce phrases that give examples. In such situations use *such as* instead.

wrong In certain months of the year, for example July and August, Penticton receives very little rainfall.

right In certain months of the year, such as July and August, Penticton receives very little rainfall.

or In certain months of the year Penticton receives very little rainfall. July and August, for example, are almost always extremely dry.

In that

471. **in that**: Do not confuse with *in the way that*.

wrong He is cruel in the way that he treats his wife harshly.

right He is cruel in that he treats his wife harshly.

or He is cruel in the way that he treats his wife.

Such as

472. **such as**: The addition of *and others* at the end of a phrase beginning with *such as* is redundant.

wrong In contrast to this perspective, sociological studies of ethnicity written from the "class" perspective (such as Bollaria and Li's 2001 paper, Chan's 1999 monograph, and others) have argued that ethnic inequality is only a special class of inequality in general.

right In contrast to this perspective, sociological studies of ethnicity written from the "class" perspective (such as Bollaria and Li's 2001 paper, and Chan's 1999 monograph) have argued that ethnic inequality is only a special class of inequality in general.

Words Used to Indicate Alternatives

either ... or	otherwise
if only	rather than
instead, instead of	unless
in that case	whether ... or
neither ... nor	or

If only

This expression is normally used when we wish that something would happen, or were true, but it clearly will not happen, or is not true.

- If only he were here, he would know what to do.
  (This indicates that he is not here.)
- "If only there were thirty hours in a day ..." she kept saying.

In that case

This expression is used when we wish to explain what will happen if the thing spoken of in the previous sentence happens, or turns out to be true. Examples:

- He may arrive before six o'clock. In that case we can all go out to dinner.
- It is quite possible that many people will dislike the new law. In that case the government may decide to change it.

Do not confuse *in that case* with *otherwise*, which is used in the reverse situation (i.e., when one wishes to explain what will happen if the thing spoken of in the previous sentence does <u>not</u> happen, or turns out to be false).

Otherwise

This word has two meanings. The first is *in other ways* (e.g., *I have a slight toothache. Otherwise I am healthy*). The second meaning can sometimes cause confusion: *otherwise* used to mean *if not*. Here the word is used when we want to talk about what will or may happen if the thing spoken of in the previous sentence does not happen. Examples:

- I will have to start immediately. Otherwise, I will not finish in time.
  (This is the same as saying, *If I do not start now, I will not finish in time.*)
- The general decided to retreat. Otherwise, he believed, all his troops would be killed.
  (This is the same as saying. *The general believed that if he decided not to retreat, all his troops would be killed.*)
- You must pay me for the car before Friday. Otherwise, I will offer it to someone else.
  (i.e., *If you do not pay me for the car before Friday, I will offer it to someone else.*)

473. **otherwise**: When used to mean *if not*, *otherwise* should normally be used to start a new sentence. It should not be used in the middle of a sentence to join two clauses.

wrong I may meet you at the party tonight, otherwise I will see you tomorrow.

right I may see you at the party tonight. Otherwise, I will see you tomorrow.

Words Used to Show Degree or Extent

for the most part	to some extent
so ... that	too ... for ... to
such ... that	to some degree
to a certain extent	

So ... that

474. **so ... that**: When separated from each other by an adjective or adverb, these two words express degree or extent, answering questions such as *How far ...?*, *How big ...?*, *How much ...?*. Examples:

- How fat is he? He is so fat that he cannot see his feet.
- How large is Canada? It is so large that you need about six days to drive across it.

So ... that is the only combination of words that can be used in this way; it is wrong to say "very fat that ..." or "too large that," just as it is wrong to leave out the word *so* and simply use *that* in such sentences.

wrong She was very late for dinner that there was no food left for her.

right She was so late for dinner that there was no food left for her.

wrong Dominic speaks quickly that it is often difficult to understand him.

right Dominic speaks so quickly that it is often difficult to understand him.

Such ... that

475. **such ... that**: Like *so ... that*, the expression *such ... that* is used to express degree or extent, answering questions such as, *How big ...?*, *How long ...?*, *How fast ...?*. Notice the difference in the way the two are used.

right How far is it? It is such a long way that you would never be able to get there walking.
or It is so far that you would never be able to reach there walking.
right How fat is he? He is such a fat man that his trousers need to be made specially for him.
or He is so fat that his trousers need to be made specially for him.

The difference between the two is of course that only one word is normally used between *so* and *that*, whereas two or three words (usually an article, an adjective, and a noun) are used between *such* and *that*. Be careful not to confuse the two, or to leave out *such*.

wrong It was a hot day that nobody could stay outside for long.
right It was such a hot day that nobody could stay outside for long.

That, which

476. **that/which**: It is correct to use *that* in restrictive clauses and *which* in non-restrictive clauses.

needs checking The only store which sells this brand is now closed.
revised The only store that sells this brand is now closed.
needs checking The position which Marx adopted owed much to the philosophy of Hegel.
revised The position that Marx adopted owed much to the philosophy of Hegel.

Although the use of the word *which* in any restrictive clause provokes a violent reaction among some English instructors, there are some instances in which one is quite justified in using *which* in this way. Such is the case when the writer is already using at least one *that* in the sentence:

needs checking He told me that the radio that he had bought was defective.
revised He told me that the radio which he had bought was defective.

Better yet, in many cases, is to avoid the use of a second relative pronoun by rephrasing:

right He told me that the radio he had bought was defective.

Indeed, instructors who object to *which* point out that rephrasing can often make the sentence shorter and crisper:

fair The ending, which comes as a surprise to most readers, is profoundly unsettling.
better The ending is both surprising and unsettling.
fair The 2002 campaign, which had been carefully planned, was an enormous success.
better The carefully-planned 2002 campaign was an enormous success.

But *which* is not a special case in this regard. *That*, *who,* and *whose* can often be fruitfully removed in the same way:

fair The surplus that we now project for 2003 will probably be exceeded in 2004.
better The projected 2003 surplus will probably be exceeded in 2004.
fair Eisenhower hired as his personal driver a woman who turned into a long-term friend.
better Eisenhower and his driver became close friends.

The vice, then, is not *which* per se, but wordiness in general. Those who focus their attention on the one word and rail that "witches ride on broomsticks" might do better to treat the excessive use of *which* as a symptom of a much broader disease.

Words Used to Make Comparisons

by comparison
in contrast
on the one hand ...
... on the other hand

Other Joining Words and Expressions

as illustrated above/below
as mentioned above/below
as we can see/we can see that
assuming that
as shown in the diagram
in that
these findings indicate that
to begin with
whereby
in other words
in the event of
in the light of
in this respect/in some respects
above/below
firstly/in the first place
secondly/in the second place
for one thing

PUNCTUATION

The Period •

The most important mark of punctuation is the full stop (or period), which is used to separate one sentence from another, and the most common punctuation mistakes involve the use of the period. The first of these is the run-on sentence: a sentence that continues running on and on instead of being broken up into two or more sentences. (Where a comma has been used instead of a period, the term *comma splice* is often used to denote a run-on sentence.) The second is the incomplete sentence (or *sentence fragment*): a group of words that has been written as if it were a full sentence, but that needs something else to make it complete.

477. **run-on sentence/comma splice**: The basic idea of a sentence is that it expresses one complete idea. Often, remembering this simple fact will be enough to keep run-on sentences at bay, particularly if one reads work over to oneself (aloud, if it's not too embarrassing) and notices where one pauses naturally.

wrong Early last Thursday we were walking in the woods it was a bright and clear morning.

right Early last Thursday we were walking in the woods. It was a bright and clear morning.

In the above example it should be quite clear that there are two separate ideas, and that these should be put into two separate sentences. Sometimes, though, it is not so simple. In particular, certain words may be used to join two clauses into one sentence, while other words should not be used in this way. We have already seen (in our survey of joining words) some examples of words that cause problems of this sort. Here is a review:

and: The appearance of more than one *and* in a sentence is often a sign that the ideas would be better rephrased.

wrong Beaverbrook effectively mobilized the resources of the country to serve the war effort overseas and he later was knighted and he is also well-known for creating a media empire.

right Beaverbrook effectively mobilized the resources of the country to serve the war effort—an accomplishment for which

he later was knighted. He is also well-known for creating a media empire.

or Beaverbrook, who had created a vast media empire before the war, then distinguished himself by effectively mobilizing the resources of the country to serve the war effort. It was in recognition of this service that he was knighted.

or Beaverbrook, who had created a vast media empire before the war, then distinguished himself by effectively mobilizing the resources of the country to serve the war effort; it was in recognition of this service that he was knighted.

hence:

wrong With the exception of identical twins no two people have exactly the same genetic makeup hence it is impossible for two people to look exactly the same.

right With the exception of identical twins no two people have exactly the same genetic makeup. Hence, it is impossible for two people to look exactly the same.

however:

wrong During the rainy season more water flows over Victoria Falls than over any other falls in the world however several other falls are higher than Victoria.

right During the rainy season more water flows over Victoria Falls than over any other falls in the world. However, several other falls are higher than Victoria.

or During the rainy season more water flows over Victoria Falls than over any other falls in the world; several other falls, however, are higher than Victoria.

otherwise:

wrong You had better leave now otherwise we will call the police.

right You had better leave now. Otherwise, we will call the police.

or You had better leave now; otherwise, we will call the police.

therefore:

wrong Money was tight and jobs were scarce, therefore she decided to stay in a job she did not like.

right Money was tight and jobs were scarce; therefore she decided to stay in a job she did not like.

Notice in the above cases that one way to correct a comma splice is often to use a semi-colon. Unlike a comma, a semi-colon may be

used as a connector between clauses. (The discussion on pages **172–173** may be helpful in this connection.)

478. **then**: An even more common cause of run-on sentences than any of the above is the word *then*. Unlike *when*, *then* should not be used to join two clauses together into one sentence. *And then* may be used, or a semi-colon, or a new sentence may be begun.

wrong We applied the solution to the surface of the leaves then we made observations at half-hour intervals over the next twelve hours.

right We applied the solution to the surface of the leaves. Then we made observations at half-hour intervals over the next twelve hours.

or We applied the solution to the surface of the leaves; then we made observations at half-hour intervals over the next twelve hours.

or We applied the solution to the surface of the leaves and then we made observations at half-hour intervals over the next twelve hours.

wrong On June 10, 1999, Yugoslav troops began withdrawing, then the NATO bombing was suspended and the war in Kosovo ended.

right On June 10, 1999, Yugoslav troops began withdrawing. Then the NATO bombing was suspended and the war in Kosovo ended.

wrong The Montreal Canadiens produced vital late-period goals then they wrapped their iron defence around the Calgary Flames to take an upper hand in the game.

right The Montreal Canadiens produced vital late-period goals and then wrapped their iron defence around the Calgary Flames to take an upper hand in the game.

479. **abbreviations**: The period is also used to form abbreviations. If in any doubt about whether or not to use a period in an abbreviation, or where to put it, think of (or look up) the full form of what is being abbreviated.

wrong Jones, Smithers et. al. will be there in person.

right Jones, Smithers et al. will be there in person.
(*Et al.* is short for the latin *et alia*, meaning *and other*.)

480. **incomplete sentences**: A good writer always asks herself as she checks her work if each sentence is complete in itself; in this way the more obvious errors will almost always be caught. For example, if

When the meeting ends tomorrow is in the rough draft as a complete sentence, re-reading will probably lead to the realization that the idea is not complete; the group of words needs another group of words to finish it (e.g., *When the meeting ends tomorrow we should have a comprehensive agreement*.). Be particularly careful with longer sentences to make sure they are complete. For example, the group of words *Marina walked to the sea* is a complete sentence, but the following sentence is incomplete, even though it is much longer; it lacks a main clause that tells us what happened when she was walking:

wrong	While Marina was walking to the sea and thinking of her father and the sound of a woodthrush.
right	While Marina was walking to the sea she heard the sound of a woodthrush and thought of her father.
wrong	Unemployment was a serious problem in Britain in the early 1990s. In fact, throughout the world.
right	Unemployment was a serious problem in the early 1990s, both in North America and in Europe.
wrong	So long as you have a place to live and enough to eat.
right	So long as you have a place to live and enough to eat, you have some reason to be thankful.

The three words which most frequently lead students to write incomplete sentences are *and*, *because,* and *so.*

481. **and**: Although there are certain cases in which it is possible to begin a sentence with *and*, these are extremely difficult to sense. It is usually better for all except professional writers not to begin sentences with *and* if they wish to avoid incomplete sentences.

worth checking	To make this crop grow well you should add Compound 'D' fertilizer to the soil. And you should add top dressing a few months later.
right	To make this crop grow well you should add Compound 'D' fertilizer to the soil, and top dressing a few months later.

482. **because**: In order to prevent young children who have difficulty in writing long sentences from writing incomplete sentences, many primary school teachers wisely tell their pupils not to begin sentences with *because*. In fact it is not incorrect to begin with *because*, so long as the sentence is complete. The rule to remember is that any sentence with *because* in it must mention both the cause and the result. Whether

the word *because* comes at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence does not matter; what is important is that the sentence has two parts.

wrong In the early 1980s Sandinista leaders told their people to be ready for war. Because the United States had been trying to destabilize Nicaragua.

right In the early 1980s Sandinista leaders told their people to be ready for war, because the United States had been trying to destabilize Nicaragua.

wrong Because of the cold and wet weather which affected the whole area. Many people were desperately trying to find more firewood.

right Because of the cold and wet weather which affected the whole area many people were desperately trying to find more firewood.

483. **so**: This word is probably the biggest single cause of incomplete sentences. As is the case with *and*, there are certain situations in which professional writers manage to get away with beginning sentences with *so*, but normally this should not be attempted. *So* should be used to join ideas together into one sentence, not to separate them by starting a new sentence.

wrong I did not know what was happening. So my friends explained the procedure to me.

right I did not know what was happening, so my friends explained the procedure to me.

wrong The meat was too heavily spiced. So most of it had to be thrown away.

right The meat was too heavily spiced, so most of it had to be thrown away.

The Ellipsis •••

Three dots are used to indicate the omission of one or more words needed to complete a sentence or other grammatical construction.

484. **ellipsis**: Note that when used in quotation an ellipsis comes inside the quotation marks, and that when an ellipsis precedes a period the sentence should end with four dots.

wrong Harris shows more than a trace of paranoia in her book; she speaks, for example, of "the elements trying to subvert the

essence of liberal society, of tolerance, of goodwill ... They are all around us."

right Harris shows more than a trace of paranoia in her book; she speaks, for example, of "the elements trying to subvert the essence of liberal society, of tolerance, of goodwill .... They are all around us."

The Comma ,

Although the omission or wrong use of a comma sounds like a small mistake, it can be very important. The following group of words, for example, forms a sentence only if a comma is included:

wrong Because of the work that we had done before we were ready to hand in the assignment.

right Because of the work that we had done before, we were ready to hand in the assignment.

The omission or addition of a comma can also completely alter the meaning of a sentence—as it did in the Queen's University Alumni letter that spoke of the warm emotions still felt by alumni for "our friends, who are dead" (rather than "our friends who are dead"). The second would have been merely a polite remembrance of those alumni who have died; the first suggests that all the friends of the reader are dead.

485. **omission of commas**: Commas very commonly come in pairs, and it is wrong to omit the second comma in a pair. Be particularly careful when putting commas around a name, or around an adjectival subordinate clause.

wrong My sister Caroline, has done very well this year in her studies.

right My sister, Caroline, has done very well this year in her studies.

wrong The snake which had been killed the day before, was, already half-eaten by ants.

right The snake, which had been killed the day before, was already half-eaten by ants.

486. **extra comma**: Writers often add a comma when they feel a sentence is getting long, regardless of whether one is needed or is appropriate.

wrong The ever-increasing gravitational pull of the global economy, is drawing almost every area of the earth into its orbit.

right The ever-increasing gravitational pull of the global economy is drawing almost every area of the earth into its orbit.

487. **serial comma**: An important use of commas is to separate the entries in lists. Many authorities feel that a comma need not appear between the last and second-last entries in a list, since these are usually separated already by the word *and*. Omitting the last comma in a series will occasionally lead to ambiguity, though; when in doubt, include the serial comma. And when the list includes items that have commas within them, use a semi-colon to separate the items in the list.

wrong This book is dedicated to my parents, Ayn Rand and God.
right This book is dedicated to my parents, Ayn Rand, and God.
wrong The three firms involved were McCarthy and Walters, Harris, Jones, and Engleby, and Cassells and Wirtz.
right The three firms involved were McCarthy and Walters; Harris, Jones, and Engleby; and Cassells and Wirtz.

The Question Mark ?

488. **question mark**: All students know that a question should be followed by a question mark, but it is easy to forget, particularly if one is writing quickly or if the question mark should appear within other punctuation.

wrong Would Britain benefit from closer ties with Europe. Almost 30 years after the UK joined the EC, the question continues to bedevil British political life.
right Would Britain benefit from closer ties with Europe? Almost 30 years after the UK joined the EC, the question continues to bedevil British political life.

The Exclamation Mark !

This mark is used to give extremely strong emphasis to a statement. It should be used very sparingly, if at all, in formal written work; most good writers avoid it completely, since they realize that it does not lend any additional impact to what they are saying.

The Semi-Colon ;

This mark is used to separate ideas that are closely related to each other. In most cases a period could be used instead; the semi-colon simply signals to the reader the close relationship between the two

ideas. In the following example the second sentence reinforces the statement of the first; a semi-colon is thus appropriate, although a period is also correct:

- This book is both exciting and profound. It is one of the best books I have read.
- This book is both exciting and profound; it is one of the best books I have read.

Similarly in the following example the second sentence gives evidence supporting the statement made in the first sentence. Again, a semi-colon is appropriate:

- The team is not as good as it used to be. It has lost four of its past five games.
- The team is not as good as it used to be; it has lost four of its last five games.

The semi-colon is also used occasionally to divide items in a series that includes other punctuation:

- The following were told to report to the coach after practice: Jackson, Form 2B; Marshall, Form 3A; Gladys, Form 1B.

The Colon :

This mark is often believed to be virtually the same as the semi-colon in the way it is used. In fact, there are some important differences. The most common uses of the colon are as follows:

- in headings, to announce that more is to follow, or that the writer is about to list a series of things.
- to introduce a quotation.
- between two clauses, to indicate that the second one provides an explanation of what was stated in the first.

This last use is very similar to the main use of the semi-colon. The subtle differences are that the semi-colon can be used in such situations when the ideas are not quite so closely related, and the colon asks the reader to pause for a slightly longer period. Note that a colon must be preceded by an independent clause; what comes before it, in other words, could be a full sentence on its own. Here are some examples:

- UNQUIET UNION: A Study of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.
- In the last four weeks he has visited five countries: Mexico, Venezuela, Panama, Haiti, and Belize.
- The theory of the Communists may be summed up in a single phrase: abolition of private property.

489. **colon**: Be sure to use a colon to introduce a list.

wrong The operation in Toronto has supplied Mr. Bomersbach with four luxury cars, two Cadillacs, a Mercedes, and a Jaguar.

right The operation in Toronto has supplied Mr. Bomersbach with four luxury cars: two Cadillacs, a Mercedes, and a Jaguar.

The Hyphen -

This mark may be used to separate two parts of a compound word (e.g., *tax-free*, *hand-operated*). Notice that many such word combinations are hyphenated only if the combination acts as an adjective:

- No change is planned for the short term.
  (*Term* acts here as a noun. with the adjective *short* modifying it.)
- This is only a short-term plan.
  (Here the compound acts as a single adjective, modifying the noun *plan*.)

Hyphens are also used to break a word at the end of a line if there is not enough space.

490. **hyphen**: A hyphen should never be used to break up proper nouns, and should be used to break up other words only when it is placed between syllables. Any noun beginning with a capital letter (e.g., *Halifax*, *Blair*, *January*, *Harriet*) is a proper noun.

wrong Thomas Huxley coined the word *agnostic* to refer to someone who does not believe in the existence of God, but is not prepared to rule out the possibility either.

right Thomas Huxley coined the word *agnostic* to refer to someone who does not believe in the existence of God, but is not prepared to rule out the possibility either.

Whenever one is uncertain about whether or not to use a hyphen, the easy solution is to put the entire word on the next line.

The Dash —

Dashes are often used in much the same way as parentheses, to set off

an idea within a sentence. Dashes, however, call attention to the set-off idea in a way that parentheses do not:

- Peterborough (home of Broadview Press) is a pleasant city of 70,000.
- Peterborough—home of Broadview Press—is a pleasant city of 70,000.

A dash may also be used in place of a colon to set off a word or phrase at the end of a sentence:

- He fainted when he heard how much he had won: one million dollars.
- He fainted when he heard how much he had won—one million dollars.

em—dashes and en–dashes: The above applies to what is known as the em dash—so-called because in most typefaces it is about the same length as the letter *m*. There is also a slightly shorted form of dash—known as the en dash—which fulfils a different function. Whereas an em dash is used to separate groups of words, an en dash is used to separate numbers, as in these examples:

- Richard Harris (1930–2002) was both a singer and a noted actor.
- The street numbers are as follows: in the first block west of Main Street, 1–100; in the second block, 100–200; and so on.

Although it is standard to use the en dash in such circumstances in published work, the en dash does not appear on most keyboards, and the hyphen is usually used in its stead in everyday work. Most keyboards also lack em dashes; in such circumstances use -- (instead of -) to distinguish a dash from a hyphen.

wrong Malaysia's Petronas Towers-the tallest buildings in the world-were completed in 1997. A tower in Shanghai is expected to surpass the record early in the present century.

right Malaysia's Petronas Towers—the tallest buildings in the world—were completed in 1997. A tower in Shanghai is expected to surpass the record early in the present century.

Parentheses ( )

Parentheses are used to set off an interruption in the middle of a sentence, or to make a point which is not part of the main flow of the sentence. They are frequently used to give examples, or to express something in other words using the abbreviation *i.e.* Example:

- Several world leaders of the 1980s (Deng in China, Reagan in the US, etc.) were very old men.

Square Brackets [ ]

Square brackets are used for parentheses within parentheses, or to show that the words within the parentheses are added by another person.

- Lentricchia claims that "in reading James' Preface [to *What Maisie Knew*] one is struck as much by what is omitted as by what is revealed."

The Apostrophe ’

The two main uses of the apostrophe are to show possession (e.g., *Peter's book*) and to shorten certain common word combinations. The shortened forms (e.g., *can't*, *shouldn't*, *he's*) are known as *contractions*.

491. **contractions**: Contractions are used frequently in this book, which is relatively informal in its style. Contractions, however, should not be used in more formal written work. Use *cannot*, not *can't*; *do not*, not *don't*; and so on.

informal	The experiment wasn't a success, because we'd heated the solution to too high a temperature.
more formal	The experiment was not a success, because we had heated the solution to too high a temperature.

492. **possession**: The correct placing of the apostrophe to show possession can be a tricky matter. When the noun is singular, the apostrophe must come before the *s* (e.g., *Peter's*, *George's*, *Canada's*), whereas when the noun is plural and ends in an s already, add the apostrophe after the *s*.

wrong	We have been asked to dinner by Harriets mother.
right	We have been asked to dinner by Harriet's mother.
worth checking	His parent's house is filled with antiques.
right	His parents' house is filled with antiques.
wrong	All three groups of parents attended their infant's one-month pediatric checkup, and observations were made of father's interactions with their infants.

right All three groups of parents attended their infants' one-month pediatric checkup, and observations were made of fathers' interactions with their infants.

When a singular noun already ends in *s*, authorities differ as to whether or not a second s should be added after the apostrophe:

correct Ray Charles' music has been very influential.
correct Ray Charles's music has been very influential.

Whichever convention a writer chooses, he should be consistent. And be sure in such cases not to put the apostrophe before the first *s*.

wrong Shield's novel is finely, yet delicately constructed. (concerning novelist Carol Shields)
right Shields' novel is finely, yet delicately constructed. (or *Shields's novel*)

Quotation Marks " "

The main use of quotation marks is to show that the words are repeated exactly as they were originally spoken or written. For a discussion of difficulties associated with this use see the chapter on direct and indirect speech immediately following.

According to different conventions, words that are being mentioned in a grammatical sense, rather than used to convey meaning, may be set off by quotation marks, single quotation marks, or italics:

- The words "except" and "accept" are sometimes confused.
- The words 'except' and 'accept' are sometimes confused.
- The words *except* and *accept* are sometimes confused.

Quotation marks (or single quotation marks) are sometimes used to indicate that the writer does not endorse the quoted statement, claim, or description. Quotation marks are usually used in this way only with a word or a brief phrase. When they are so used they have the connotation of *supposed* or *so-called*; they suggest that the quoted word or phrase is either euphemistic or downright false:

- After a violent workout the weightlifters would each consume a "snack" of a steak sandwich, a half-dozen eggs, several pieces of bread and butter, and a quart of tomato juice.

In the following two versions of the same report, the more sparing use of quotation marks in the second version signals clearly to the reader the writer's scepticism as to the honesty of the quoted claim, and may be taken to imply that the former Russian President indulged his legendary fondness for alcohol during the flight.

- President Yeltsin appeared to stagger as he left the plane. "The President is feeling tired and emotional," his Press Secretary later reported.
- A "tired and emotional" President Yeltsin appeared to stagger as he left the plane.

493. **misuse of quotation marks to indicate emphasis**: Quotation marks (unlike italics, bold letters, capital letters, or underlining) should never be used to try to lend emphasis to a particular word or phrase. Because quotation marks may be used to convey the sense *supposed* or *so-called* (see above), the common misuse of quotation marks to try to lend emphasis often creates ludicrous effects.

wrong	All our bagels are served "fresh" daily. (The unintended suggestion here is that the claim of freshness is a dubious one.)
right	All our bagels are served fresh daily.
or	All our bagels are served **fresh** daily. (if emphasis is required in an advertisement)
wrong	Dogs must be "leashed." (BC ferries sign)
right	Dogs must be leashed.

Single Quotation Marks ‘ ’

In North America the main use of single quotation marks is to mark quotations within quotations:

- According to Clinton's Press Secretary, "When the President said, 'I never inhaled,' he meant it."

Depending on convention, single quotation marks may also be used to show that a word or phrase is being mentioned rather than used (see above).

In the United Kingdom and some other countries, quotation marks and single quotation marks are used for direct speech in precisely the opposite way that North Americans use them; single quotation marks (or inverted commas, as they are sometimes called) are used for direct

speech, and double marks are used for quotations within quotations. Here is the correct British version of the above sentence:

- According to Clinton's Press Secretary, 'When the President said, "I never inhaled", he meant it.'

Note here that UK usage also places the comma outside the quotation mark.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPEECH

Direct Speech

Direct speech is a written record of the exact words used by the person speaking. The main rules for writing direct speech in English are as follows:

- The exact words spoken—and no other words—must be surrounded by quotation marks.
- A comma should precede a quotation, but according to American convention other punctuation should be placed inside the quotation marks. Examples:

  He said, "I think I can help you."
  (The period after *you* comes before the quotation marks.)

  "Drive slowly," she said, "and be very careful."
  (The comma after *slowly* and period after *careful* both come inside the quotation marks.)

With each change in speaker a new paragraph should begin. Example:

> "Let's go fishing this weekend," Mary suggested. "It should be nice and cool by the water."
> "Good idea," agreed Faith. "I'll meet you by the store early Saturday morning."

British convention, however, places the punctuation *outside* the quotation marks:

- 'An iron curtain is descending across Europe', declared Winston Churchill in 1946.

Canadian usage allows writers either to follow the American convention or to make an exception when the punctuation clearly pertains only to the structure of the surrounding sentence and not to the quoted word or phrase:

- "An iron curtain is descending across Europe," declared Winston Churchill in 1946.
- Was it Churchill who described the post-war divide between newly Communist Eastern Europe and the West as "an iron curtain"?

The most common difficulties experienced when recording direct speech are as follows:

494. **omission of quotation marks**: This happens particularly frequently at the end of a quotation.

wrong She said, "I will try to come to see you tomorrow. Then she left.
right She said, "I will try to come to see you tomorrow." Then she left.

495. **placing punctuation outside the quotation marks**:

wrong He shouted, "The house is on fire"!
right He shouted, "The house is on fire!"

496. **including the word *that* before direct speech**: *That* is used before passages of indirect speech, not before passages of direct speech.

wrong My brother said that, "I think I have acted stupidly."
right My brother said, "I think I have acted stupidly."
or My brother said that he thought he had acted stupidly.
wrong The official indicated that, "we are not prepared to allow galloping inflation."
right The official said, "We are not prepared to allow galloping inflation."
or The official indicated that his government was not prepared to allow galloping inflation.

497. **when to indent**: In a formal essay, any quotation longer than three lines should normally be single-spaced and indented to set it off from the body of the text. Any quotation of more than a single line from a poem should also be single-spaced and indented. Quotations set off from the body of the text in this way should not be preceded or followed by quotation marks.

wrong Larkin's last great poem, 'Au bade,' is haunted by the fear of death: "Not to be here, Not to be anywhere, And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true." Some have called the vision of the poem unremittingly grim, but it is filled with subtle shadings.
right Larkin's last great poem, 'Au bade,' is haunted by the fear of death:

Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

Some have called the vision of the poem unremittingly grim, but it is filled with subtle shadings.

See under Sequence of Tenses (page 30) and Writing About Literature (page 238) for discussions of other difficulties in using quotations.

Indirect Speech

Indirect speech reports what was said without using the same words that were used by the speaker. The rules for writing indirect speech are as follows:

- Do not use quotation marks.
- Introduce statements with the word *that*, and do not put a comma after *that*. Questions should be introduced with the appropriate question word (*what, why, whether, if, how, when,* etc.).
- Change first person pronouns and adjectives (e.g., *I, me, we, us, my, our*) to third person (*he, she, they, him, her, them, his, hers,* etc.).

  "I am not happy with our team's performance," said Paul.
  Paul said that he was not happy with his team's performance.

- Second person pronouns must also sometimes be changed.
- Change the tenses of the verbs to agree with the main verb of the sentence. Usually this involves moving the verbs one step back into the past from the tenses that were used by the speaker in direct speech. Notice in the above example, for instance, that the present tense *am* has been changed to the past tense *was* in indirect speech. Here are other examples:

  "We will do everything we can," he assured me.
  He assured me that they would do everything they could.
  (*Will* and *can* change to *would* and *could*.)
  "You went to school near Brandon, didn't you?" he asked me.
  He asked me if I had gone to school near Brandon.
  (*Went* changes to *had gone*.)

- Change expressions having to do with time. This is made necessary by the changes in verbs discussed above. For example, *today* in direct speech normally becomes *on that day* in indirect speech, *yesterday* becomes *on the day before*, *tomorrow* becomes *the next day*, and so on.

The most common problems made when indirect speech is being used are as follows:

498. **confusion of pronouns**: Many writers do not remember to change all the necessary pronouns when shifting from direct to indirect speech.

- When I met him he said, "You have cheated me." (direct speech)

wrong When I met him he said that you had cheated me.
right When I met him he said that I had cheated him.

- He will probably say to you, "I am poor. I need money."

wrong He will probably tell you that he is poor and that I need money.
right He will probably tell you that he is poor and that he needs money.

499. **verb tenses**: Remember to shift the tenses of the verbs one step back into the past when changing something into indirect speech.

- She said, "I will check my tires tomorrow."

wrong She said that she will check her tires the next day.
right She said that she would check her tires the next day.

- "Can I go with you later this afternoon?" he asked.

wrong He asked if he can go with us later that afternoon.
right He asked if he could go with us later that afternoon.

PARAGRAPHING

500. **error in paragraphing**: There is a degree of flexibility when it comes to the matter of where and how often to start new paragraphs. Sometimes a subtle point in an argument will require a paragraph of almost an entire page to elaborate; occasionally a single sentence can form an effective paragraph. Yet separating ideas into paragraphs remains an important aid to the processes of both reading and writing. Here are some guidelines as to when it is appropriate to begin a new paragraph:

In Narration:

- whenever the story changes direction.
  (*This was the moment Paul Martin had been waiting for ..., When Napoleon left Elba he ....*)
- when there is a gap in time in the story.
  (*Two weeks later the issue was raised again in cabinet ....*)

In Description:

- whenever you switch from describing one place, person, or thing to describing another.
  (*Even such a brief description as this has been is enough to give some sense of the city and its pretensions. Much more interesting in many ways are some of British Columbia's smaller cities and towns ....*)

In Persuasion or Argument:

- when a new topic is introduced.
  (*There can be little doubt that Austen's asides on the literary conventions of her time provide an amusing counterpoint to her story. But does this running commentary detract from the primary imaginative experience of* Northanger Abbey?)
- when there is a change in direction of the argument.
  (*To this point we have been looking only at the advantages of a guaranteed annual income. We should also ask, however, whether or not it would be practical to implement.*)

When Changing From One Mode To Another:

- Description, narration, and argument are commonly blended together in writing. If, for example, a text moves from describing an experiment to analysing its significance, it's a good time to start a new paragraph. If it moves from telling where Napoleon went and what he did to discussing why events unravelled in this way, the same holds true.

GENERALIZATION, ABSTRACTION, JARGON, AND DOUBLESPEAK

Generalization is the process of moving from an observation or conclusion about a single thing or a small number of things to a conclusion about all or most of that group. Abstraction, on the other hand, is at its most basic level the isolation of some particular quality of a thing from the rest of its properties—the consideration of the colour of a particular object, for example.

Many people are a bit hazy on the difference between abstraction and generalization—not surprisingly, since the two are related activities that we often perform simultaneously. Perhaps the best way of keeping them straight is to remember that the opposite of *general* is *particular,* while the opposite of *abstract* is *concrete*:

- *Emotions* is a broad general category; *love* and *hate* are particular emotions.
  (None is a concrete thing.)
- The greenness of the Brazilian flag is an abstraction; the flag itself is a concrete thing.
  (We may also, of course, speak of one particular Brazilian flag or of the Brazilian flag in general, or of all flags in general; there can be numerous levels of both abstraction and generalization.)

A great deal of writing involves shifts not only from the general to the particular and back again but also from one level of generalization to another:

- An article on Chippendale chairs would probably refer to particular examples from the eighteenth century studio of Thomas Chippendale himself, generalize about all chairs of that type, generalize further about the furniture of the period, and perhaps generalize at one higher level about how and why such designs suited the overall sensibilities of eighteenth century England.
- An English literature essay might make a general claim about Jane Austen's use of irony. It might then descend one level of generality to discuss the differences in the degree to which the generalization applies in the various novels. It might then move to a lower level of generality, distinguishing between the scenes in *Northanger Abbey* that are suffused with the characteristic Austen sense of irony and those (apparently remaining from the first draft of the novel) that are almost pure melodrama with no irony to them whatsoever. Finally, the essay would doubtless give particular examples—quote sentences or paragraphs that exemplify an ironic tone and a melodramatic one.

Both abstraction and generalization are important mental processes for any writer; they help us, as Janet Giltrow puts it, to "name and manage otherwise unruly details." But writers have to learn to use them with care. As a rule, generalizations must be supported by evidence. (Generalizations that are commonplace may be made without support; one does not need to provide evidence in support of the generalization that dogs have four legs or that war is a terrible thing.) And they should be precise. *Most Canadians voted against the Free Trade Agreement in the 1988 election* is an imprecise generalization. *In the 1988 election most Canadians voted for parties that opposed the Free Trade Agreement* is more accurate. Such concern for precision may seem like pedantry; is there any difference between the two? Yes, there is. In that election, many Canadians who opposed Free Trade nevertheless voted for the Conservatives, just as many Canadians who supported Free Trade voted for the Liberals or the NDP. Free Trade was the most contentious issue in the campaign, but not the only one; it was an election, not a referendum. Being careful about such distinctions is an important element of good writing.

501. **mixed levels of abstraction or generalization**: When a comparison is being drawn or an extended argument is being shaped, the levels of abstraction or generalization should be kept consistent.

wrong Ethnicity, like the aged, women, and others, is believed by some scholars to be best understood within a broad context of inequality, and outside of any specific "cultural" argument.

right Ethnicity, like age, gender, and other categories on the basis of which discrimination may occur, is believed by some scholars to be best understood within a broad context of inequality, and outside of any specific "cultural" argument.

502. **excessive abstraction**: Almost any combination of abstract words can create fuzziness of meaning unless the writer exercises extreme care. Look at the following passage, for example:

- There are two features of Nyerere's later view of the transition to socialism which distinguish it from his earlier view. First, the trends in Tanzanian society which he felt would soon greatly increase the strength of the opposition to socialism led him in the years after the Arusha Declaration to a greater sense of urgency about the need seriously to set in train the transition to socialism. Second, he had by his mid-forties a much clearer perception than he had had as a younger man of the initiatives the government should take to achieve an effective transition to socialism.

> This new perception of the transition to socialism owed much, of course, to the character of the socialist society which Nyerere finally hoped to achieve. It was, however, very much shaped as well by his understanding of the political realities of Tanzania at the time.
>
> It was Nyerere's ideas on the transition to socialism rather than his vision of a transformed Tanzania which had a direct and major impact upon policy and politics in the years after the Arusha Declaration. (Cranford Pratt, *The Critical Phase in Tanzania*)

This is the sort of thing English instructors have in mind when they tell their students to use concrete words rather than abstractions. By itself there is nothing wrong with any of the words *features, transition, socialism, distinguish, trends, opposition, perception, initiatives, character, socialist society, understanding, political realities, ideas, vision, transformed, impact,* or *policy*. But put them together in a string like this—unbroken by any words like dog, box, tree, or paper—and you have writing that puts even the most determined reader to sleep. Moreover, the writer who consistently uses such words is likely to find herself circling round and round in a fog. (It should not be inferred that Cranford Pratt is such a writer; the point of including a passage from a book by this distinguished professor is rather that even the best writers must be wary of such problems.) Let's try the first paragraph again:

- By the time of the Arusha Declaration Nyerere had realized how deeply and strongly the currents of opposition to socialism flowed; he would have to move fast. But he had also realized much more clearly by this time what the government could do to speed up the process.

Some academics might complain that this version is too journalistic, but at least it has the virtue of clarity. What about the rest? Pratt seems to be saying something like this:

- How much did Nyerere's vision of socialism itself have to do with the change in his view of how it should be achieved? Some, of course, but not much. It was his concept of how the vision should be achieved rather than the vision itself that shaped Tanzanian politics in the years after the Arusha Declaration.

Does this in fact say anything of importance? Not really; it might be best to cut the entire paragraph. But until one trims some of the verbal foliage away, it is difficult to see how little is being said.

503. **jargon**: Every academic discipline and indeed every area of human life has its own jargon; it is no fault in English to use jargon

appropriate to one's subject matter and audience. But it is easy to overdo the use of jargon, and all too easy to write in ways that may be appreciated by only a small number when one's subject justifies aiming for a larger audience.

The excessive use of jargon may be as much a problem of psychology as it is of English grammar and usage. It often comes from people being more concerned with making themselves sound knowledgeable and intellectual than with acquiring knowledge or developing their intelligence; more concerned with making their ideas sound important than with thinking them through and expressing them clearly. The best way to guard against excessive jargon is always to ask yourself if you are saying what you mean in the simplest possible way. Let us look at some examples:

- The very fact that these articles criticizing the government had been published in the state-controlled newspaper told the reader something of consequence. It indicated that these were the parameters within which debate had been sanctioned by the Central Committee of the ruling party.

The jargon word here is of course *parameters*. This word has a very specific technical meaning in mathematics, and should not be used in other contexts. It gained currency out of a confusion with *perimeter* (the boundary of a closed area), and out of people's desire to use words that sound impressive but are clearly understood by neither writer nor reader. *Sanction* is another troublesome word in the passage—it would be a perfectly good word if it had not come to take on two diametrically opposed meanings. Here one presumes it means to *approve of*, but it is possible that it means to *restrict* instead. Because of such ambiguity the word is best avoided. The more general question is whether this writer has expressed his or her meaning in the clearest and most concise way possible. Let's try again:

- The very fact that these articles criticizing the government had been published in the state-controlled newspaper told the reader that the Central Committee of the ruling party had allowed debate in these areas.

Notice the other changes we have made: cutting the wordy "told the reader something of consequence," and changing from a passive verb (*had been sanctioned*) to an active one (*had allowed*). This change puts the subject (*the Central Committee*) at the beginning of the second clause, and allows us to cut "It indicated."

The final result is a sentence that is a good deal simpler and shorter. One cannot be fooled into thinking it says anything particularly profound, but one needn't waste any time in puzzling out what the writer means.

jargon The plan is more philosophical than operational in terms of framework.

clear The plan is still only an idea; it hasn't yet been tried, and it may not work.

jargon This paper argues that by interrogating the author's constructions of difference we may more nearly approach the critical taxonomy by which she de-centers and indeed subverts the tropes of race and of gender.

clear How does the author construct difference? What categories does she see things falling into? This paper argues that she de-centers and indeed subverts the tropes through which race and gender have traditionally been presented.

(Note that the clearer version here is created more by re-phrasing than by removing jargon.)

jargon The great interfaces across the entire spectrum of Canadian-American relations are in order.

clear Canada and the United States are on good terms.

Here is a list of commonly used jargon words and expressions; if you find yourself using them a good deal, think about whether you might better re-phrase:

access	commence
enhance	impact on
implement	interface
optimal	opt for
parameter	point in time
previous to	prior to
prioritize	specificity
structure	totality
utilize	viable

-wise (money-wise, sales-wise, weather-wise, etc.)

504. **doublespeak**: George Orwell coined the word *doublespeak* in his novel *1984* to describe the use of language to disguise one's true meaning. This is a variant of jargon that one should try particularly hard to avoid. Here are a few humorous but saddening examples:

poor The government must deal with the issue of revenue enhancement.

better The government will have to raise taxes.

poor Our guest rooms feature the most prestigious body cleaning systems.

better We have good bathtubs.

poor We provide outplacement consulting to companies involved in downsizing their operations.

better We advise companies on how best to fire people.

(These examples are taken from the *Quarterly Review of Doublespeak*, which is published by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Ill. 61801.)

BIAS-FREE LANGUAGE

505. **gender:** The healthy revolution in attitudes towards gender roles in the last generation has created some awkwardness in English usage—though not nearly so much as some have claimed. *Chair* is a simple non-sexist replacement for *chairman*, as is *business people* for *businessmen*. Nor is one forced into *garbageperson* or *policeperson*; *police officer* and *garbage collector* are entirely unobjectionable even to the linguistic purist. *Fisher* is a quite delightful replacement for *fisherman*; here again, there is no need for the *-person* suffix.

The use of *mankind* to mean *humanity*, and of *man* to mean *human being*, have for some years been rightly frowned upon. (Ironically enough, *man* originally had *human being* as its only meaning; in Old English a *werman* was a male adult human being, a *wifman* a female.) A remarkable number of adults still cling to sexist usages, however, and even still try to convince themselves that it is possible to use *man* in a gender-neutral fashion. Among them are the editors of *The Economist*, who posed the question, "What is Man?" in the lead article of their September 14, 1996, issue. "To what extent are men's actions determined by their genes?" the article asked, and clearly did not intend the answer to apply to only one-half the human race.

Well, why can't *man* be gender neutral? To start with, because of the historical baggage such usage carries with it. Here, for example, is what the best-selling novelist Grant Allen had to say on the topic in a magazine called *Forum* in 1889:

> • In man, I would confidently assert, as biological fact, the males are the race; the females are merely the sex told off to recruit and reproduce it. All that is distinctly human is man—the field, the ship, the mine, the workshop; all that is truly woman is merely reproductive—the home, the nursery, the schoolroom.

But the baggage is not merely historical; much of the problem remains embedded in the language today. As it happens, a useful litmus test appeared in the same issue of *The Economist*. Further on in the magazine this sentence appears:

> • One of the most basic distinctions in human experience—that between men and women—is getting blurrier and blurrier.

Now let's try the same sentence using *man's* instead of *human*:

- One of the most basic distinctions in man's experience—that between men and women—is getting blurrier and blurrier.

In this sort of context we are all forced to sense that something is amiss. We have to realise when we see such examples that *man* and *he* and even *mankind* inevitably carry with them some whiff of maleness; they can never fully and fairly represent all of humanity. (If they didn't carry with them some scent of maleness it wouldn't be possible to make a joke about the difficulty of turning *men* into *human beings*.) Most contexts are of course more subtle than this, and it is thus often easy for humans—but especially for men—not to notice that the male terms always carry with them connotations that are not gender-neutral. *Humanity, humans, people*—these words are not in any way awkward or jargon-ridden; let's use them.

To replace *man* with *humanity* is not inherently awkward to even a slight degree. But the pronouns are more difficult. Clearly the consistent use of *he* to represent both sexes is unacceptable. Yet *he/she*, *s/he*, and *he or she* are undeniably awkward. *S/he* is quite functional on the printed page, but defies translation into oral English. Another solution is to avoid the singular pronoun as much as possible either by repeating nouns (*An architect should be aware of the architect's clients' budgets as well as the architect's grand schemes*) or by switching to the plural (*Architects should be aware of their clients' budgets as well as of their own grand schemes*). Of these two the second is obviously preferable. In longer works some prefer a third strategy that eliminates awkwardness entirely: to alternate between the masculine pronoun *he* and the feminine pronoun *she* when referring to a single, generic member of a group. Using *she* to refer to, say, an architect, or a professor, or a sports star, or a prime minister can have the salutary effect of reminding readers or listeners that there is nothing inherently male in these occupations. In a short piece of writing, however, it can be distracting to the reader if there are several bounces back and forth between female and male in the same paragraph. And a cautionary note should accompany this strategy even when it may conveniently be employed: be very careful not to assign *he* to all the professors, executives, or doctors; and *she* to all the students, secretaries, or nurses.

pronouns: Undoubtedly the most troublesome questions for those who are concerned both about gender equality and about good English arise over situations involving singular pronouns such as *everyone, anyone, anybody, somebody, someone, no one, each, either, neither*. It can be difficult enough to re-cast sentences involving such words so

that everything agrees even before the issue of gender enters the picture.

- Everybody felt that the film was better than any other they had seen that year.

According to the rules most of us have been taught, that sentence is wrong; *everybody* is singular, and *they* must therefore be changed:

- Everybody felt that the film was better than any other she had seen that year.
- Everybody felt that the film was better than any other he had seen that year.
- Everybody felt that the film was better than any other she or he had seen that year.

But, as Robertson Cochrane has pointed out ("Sex and the Single Pronoun," *The Globe and Mail*, May 1992), the insistence on the singularity of such pronouns is a relatively recent phenomenon, dating from the codification of English grammar that took root in the eighteenth century. Before that time Chaucer, Shakespeare, Swift, and the rest had no qualms about using *they* or *their* to refer to *anyone* and *everyone*. Cochrane persuasively argues that returning to the ways of Chaucer and Shakespeare in this respect is better than constantly trying "to write around the pronoun problem, and [it is] certainly less offensive than arrogantly and 'properly' applying masculine labels to all of humankind."

inappropriate	Mankind cannot bear too much reality.
gender neutral	Human kind cannot bear too much reality.
inappropriate (*though "correct"*)	Everyone will have a chance to express his views before the meeting is over.
gender neutral (though "incorrect")	Everyone will have a chance to express their views before the meeting is over.

Of course issues of gender are not confined to the right word choice. Consider the following descriptions of political candidates with essentially the same backgrounds:

- Carla Jenkins, a lawyer and a School Board Trustee, is also the mother of three lovely daughters.
- George Kaplan, a lawyer and a School Board Trustee, has a long record of public service in the region.

- George Kaplan, a lawyer and a School Board Trustee, is also the father of three lovely daughters.
- Carla Jenkins, a lawyer and a School Board Trustee, has a long record of public service in the region.

The impression left in many minds by such phrasings is that the person described as having a long record of public service is well suited to public office, while the person whose parenting is emphasized may be better suited to staying at home.

Some may feel that parenthood is relevant in such cases; if you do, be sure to mention it both for women and for men. The general rule should be that parenting (and physical appearance) should not be mentioned unless you feel them relevant to the point(s) you are making.

Before leaving the issue of gender and language, let me raise the issue of the attitude we bring with us when we read or write. Some writers seem to prefer to think of gender-neutral language as inherently awkward or absurd. Here's an example of what I mean, taken from a widely-adopted textbook:

> *Maintaining Objectivity*
>
> Avoiding discriminating language is important. Just as important, however, is avoiding a witch hunt. Taken to extremes, political correctness will weaken your writing. Middleman, for example, is a perfectly legitimate term, widely understood. There is no point in confusing readers by substituting distributional intermediary merely to avoid the suffix *-man*. Little is gained by referring to a stripper as an ecdysiast when most readers will not recognise the euphemism. And no one is going to take seriously a writer who calls short people vertically challenged. Remember, the point of considerate language is to be fair and polite, not to be obscure or silly. (Bonnie Carter & Craig Skates, *The Rinehart Guide to Grammar and Style*. Fort Worth: Rinehart, 4/e 1996)

Think about this for only a moment, and it may seem quite unexceptionable—entirely reasonable, even. Think again. The tip-off here is the way that the question of the word *middleman* has been approached. Not as the occasion for an interesting, if possibly difficult search for ways of expressing ourselves that will avoid both awkwardness and bias, but rather as a matter that will inevitably involve a choice between the two. The authors here seem more interested in finding reasons to ridicule the struggle for fairness than in joining in the effort to improve things.

Let's approach the word in a different frame of mind. To start

with, the fair comparison is not between *distributional intermediary* and *middleman* but between *intermediary* and *middleman*. Perhaps the former is more awkward, but it is not obviously so:

- One of the reasons for high prices in this industry is that there are too many middlemen.
- One of the reasons for high prices in this industry is that there are too many intermediaries.

Alternatives in different circumstances may include *wholesalers, distributors, go-betweens*—none of them obscure, confusing, or laughable. Ecdysiast is indeed a laughable euphemism, but not one that is needed to circumvent biased usages. (*He's a male stripper* suffers from the same defect as *He's a male nurse*, but *stripper* in itself is gender-neutral.) And, though there is indeed a societal bias against short people, no one seriously suggests euphemism as a solution.

For many years now "politically correct" has been used with quotation marks around it to mean *aesthetically distasteful and ethically wrong-headed*—and we are often meant to be left with the suggestion that those who criticise the "politically correct" do not themselves have a political agenda; they are "maintaining objectivity." It is telling in this connection that the authors of *The Rinehart Guide* couch the matter as an issue of etiquette rather than one of equity: "the point of considerate language is to be fair and polite." To be sure, it is a virtue to be polite and considerate. But unquestioning politeness to those in positions of power and privilege may sometimes entail an acceptance of terms of reference that are anything but fair. Sometimes one may have to choose beween being fair and being polite. And the point of searching for bias-free ways of expressing oneself is in fact not to be polite, but to be fair. Sometimes it comes to a choice; language can be an instrument of positive change, or an instrument of repression. In that context we can probably never avoid being biased in one direction or the other, and we are wise to remember that complete objectivity is impossible.

None of this should be taken to suggest that there are not awkwardnesses to struggle with in the search for bias-free coinages. (*Statesman* and *manned spaceflight*, for example, resist easy substitutions.) But these are surprisingly few. In most cases one need not resort to the oft-lampooned *person* suffix. *Chair* and *flight attendant* felt a little odd at first (in language as in the rest of life it may take a while to get used to new things), but no one is bothered by them now. *First-year student* still feels odd to many Americans, but not in Canada, where it has always been used. And the process continues. *Snowbody* is

a wonderful word that my daughter and a friend of hers helped me make up, but I suspect it will be years before *snowman* begins to sound as clunky as *stewardess*. Try it, though—and try to smile in fun rather than in derision. Put the accent on the first syllable. And remember, there are few things more gender-neutral than a body made up of three spheres of snow.

race, culture, and sexual orientation: Although gender is the most contentious issue in the struggle for bias-free language, it is not the only one. Almost everyone is aware that one should avoid various terms for particular racial or cultural groups (see the list below), and it is just as important to avoid language that conveys derogatory implications on the basis of sexual orientation. The most appropriate terms to use do not stay constant, however; everything hinges on connotation, and since connotations may change over time, so does appropriate usage. The best principle to follow here is to pay attention to how members of particular groups prefer to be described.

A few racial and cultural terms are so deeply encoded in the language that people may use them without being aware of their underlying meaning.

offensive I'm convinced that the shopkeeper tried to gyp me. (*Gyp* originated in the prejudice that Roma were congenital cheats.)

bias-free I'm convinced that the shopkeeper tried to cheat me.

Another example of a widely-used expression that is strongly if more subtly coloured with bias is the expression *white trash*. The implications of the expression are brought forward in the following passage:

- The [Jerry Lee] Lewis and [Jimmy] Swaggart clans were, in the harsh modern parlance, white trash. They lived in the black part of town, and had close relations with blacks. Mr. Swaggart's preaching and Mr. Lewis's music were strongly influenced by black culture. "Jimmy Swaggart was as black as a white man can be," said black elders in Ferriday. (*The Economist*, April 15, 2000)

This passage brings out the implication of the expression; the "trashiness" that is the exception for white people is implicitly regarded as the norm for black people.

Given the generally high level of awareness in Western society of the evils of anti-Semitism it is extraordinary that *jew* is still sometimes

used in casual conversation as a verb in the same way that *gyp* is used. It is a use that should never be allowed to go unchallenged—and when such usages are challenged speakers will often realise they have been unthinkingly using a coinage learnt in childhood—and will change.

Less obviously offensive but still objectionable is the use of unnecessary racial or gender or religious identifiers. Mentioning a person's race or gender or religion in connection with occupation is a common habit, but one that reinforces stereotypes as to what sort of person one would naturally expect to be a lawyer or a doctor or a nurse. Unless race or gender or religion is in some way relevant to the conversation, there is no need to refer to someone as a *male nurse*, or a *Jewish doctor*, or a *Native lawyer*.

In one important respect the issue of bias-free usage differs from every other issue discussed in this book. Throughout, our focus has been on formal writing, and it has frequently been emphasized that many informal and colloquial usages that are inappropriate to formal writing may be quite unexceptional in other forms of writing, or in speech. The same cannot be said of the difference between biased and bias-free language. It is no less damaging to use sexist, racist, or homophobic language in speech than it is in writing; indeed, it may even be more so. The cumulative repetition in speech of colloquial expressions—including such "innocent" expressions as the contemptuous use of *that's so gay*—probably does considerably more to reinforce human prejudice than does the written word.

Bias-free Vocabulary: A Short List

actress	actor
alderman	councillor
bad guy	villain
bellboy	bellhop
bogeyman	bogey monster
businessman	businessperson, entrepreneur
caveman	cave-dweller
chairman	chair
clergyman	minister, member of the clergy
congressman	representative
con-man	con-artist
draftsman	drafter
Eskimo	Inuit
NB Some Alaskan groups still prefer *Eskimo*.	
fireman	firefighter

fisherman	fisher
foreman	manager, supervisor
freshman	first-year student
garbageman	garbage collector
gunman	shooter
gyp	cheat, con
Gypsies	Roma
henchmen	thugs
Indian	Native, First Nations

NB As with *Eskimo/Inuit* and *African American/black*, the key consideration is sensitivity to audience. If you do not belong to the group but you know that the people you are writing about prefer a particular designation, that is the one to use.

infantryman	footsoldier
layman	layperson
longshoreman	shiploader, stevedore
maid	housekeeper
mailman	letter carrier, mail carrier
male nurse	nurse
man	humanity
man (an exhibit)	staff
man (a barricade)	fortify, occupy
man (a ship)	crew
manhandle	rough-up, maul
manhole	sewer hole, access hole, street hole
manhole cover	sewer cover, street hole cover
mankind	human kind, people, humanity, humans
manly	self-confident, courageous, straightforward
manmade	handmade, human-made, constructed
middleman	intermediary
negro	black, African American

NB In the United States *African-American* is generally preferred; in Canada *black* is often the preferred term.

policeman	police officer
postman	letter carrier, mail carrier
salesman	salesperson
snowman	snowbody (rhymes with *nobody*)
sportsman	sportsperson
stewardess	flight attendant
unsportsmanlike	unsporting
waitress	server

weatherman	weather forecaster
womanly	warm, tender, nurturing, sympathetic
workman	worker, labourer

NB A much more complete guide is Rosalie Maggio's *Talking About People: A Guide to Fair and Accurate Language* (Oryx Press, 3/e 1997).

METAPHOR AND MEANING

Metaphors may either enliven prose or deaden it; it is all in how you use them. In that sentence there are two metaphors; the verbs *enliven* and *deaden* both implicitly compare writing to a living thing. As this suggests, a metaphor is a comparison of one thing to another made through the use of a word or words that do not apply literally. *My love is a red, red rose* is a metaphor. *My love is <u>like</u> a red, red rose* is a simile—a type of metaphor that uses the word *like*. We do not often use poetic metaphors like this in prose, but nevertheless our writing is likely to be strongly laced with metaphorical language. Phrases such as the following are all too familiar to us:

- That will be the acid test.
- The United States has always been a melting pot.
- He is barking up the wrong tree.
- I threw caution to the winds.
- This reorganization lays the foundation for future change.
- We were told that we would have to bite the bullet.
- The government's move has paved the way for a resumption of talks.
- We are opening up new horizons.
- The university was then a hotbed of unrest.

For the most part these are what are known as dead metaphors—metaphors that have been used so frequently that they no longer conjure up any physical image in the minds of those who hear or read them. When we hear the phrase *miss the boat* we do not think of a boat, any more than we think of pavement when we hear the expression *paved the way for*. It is a moot point whether a dead metaphor is better than no metaphor at all, but certainly a fresh metaphor is far better than either. Instead of *paved the way*, for example, what about *blazed a path*? Instead of a *hotbed* try a *cauldron*. Instead of *nipping something in the bud*, try *digging up the seedlings*. It may take a little longer, but the improvement in one's writing is worth it.

So many people have been using metaphors for so long that it is extremely difficult to find fresh ones for every idea you wish to express. One useful compromise is to try to bring dead metaphors to life by using them in new ways. For example, no one thinks of a wave if you say, *The Mayor has been riding a wave of popular support since his election*. Mention the wave again in a slightly different way, however, and it becomes water again to the reader:

- The Mayor has been riding a wave of popular support since the election. The question now is when that wave will crest.
- The company wanted to nip in the bud the spreading unrest among its employees before it became a tangled, snake-infested jungle.

506. **mixed metaphors**: A dead metaphor all too often becomes a mixed metaphor as well. Mixed metaphors occur when we are not really thinking of the meaning of the words we use. *If we bite the bullet we have to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater*; *We will leave no stone unturned as we search for an avenue through which the issue may be resolved*. As soon as one really thinks about such sentences one realizes that the bullet is really better off out of the baby's bathwater, and that the best way to search for an avenue is not to turn stones over.

wrong	Now Chretien is out on a limb because his colleagues pulled the rug out from under him.
right	Now Chretien is out on a limb and some of his colleagues are preparing to saw it off.
wrong	The man in the street has trouble keeping his head above water.
right	The average person today has trouble keeping his head above water.

SLANG AND INFORMAL ENGLISH

507. **slang/informal English**: The following words and expressions are often used in conversation, but not in formal English. The more formal word is listed afterwards. The most frequently troublesome entries are given a separate number:

anyways	anyway
anywheres, anyplace	anywhere
awful	poor, miserable, sick
awfully	very, extremely

Some authorities continue to hold that *awful* should retain its original meaning of *filled with or inspiring awe*. In any case, a better replacement can always be found. The same is even more true of the use of the adverb *awfully* as an intensifier to mean *very* (*awfully good*, *awfully small*, etc.).

boss	manager, supervisor
bunch	group
(except for grapes, bananas, etc.)	
buy	bargain
(as a noun—*a good buy*, etc.)	
kid	child, girl, boy
kind of, sort of	rather, in some respects
let's us	let us
lots of	a great deal of
mad	angry
(unless the meaning is insane)	

All contractions (*it's, he's, there's, we're,* etc.) should be avoided in formal writing, as should conversational markers such as *Well, ...*

508. **could care less/couldn't care less**: In the early 1990s people started to say sarcastically *I could care less* to mean the opposite—that they *couldn't* care less. For some time *I could care less* seemed to be taking over, regardless of the tone of voice used, and the meaning of the words themselves seemed in danger of being lost. In recent years *couldn't care less* has made something of a comeback.

wrong	Most of the time most people could care less about what their elected representatives are doing.
right	Most of the time most people couldn't care less about what their elected representatives are doing.

509. **get**: should not be used to mean *come, go, be,* or *become*

wrong	Henry and Jane Seymour got married in 1536, only ten days after the death of Anne Boleyn.
right	Henry and Jane Seymour were married in 1536, only ten days after the death of Anne Boleyn.

510. **go** (to mean *say*)

wrong	He goes, "What do you mean?"
right	He said, "What do you mean?"

511. **have got** (to mean *have*)

less formal	He has got two houses and three cars.
more formal	He has two houses and three cars.

In conversational English *got* has become widely used as an auxilliary verb, probably because of the awkwardness of pronouncing certain combinations involving common contractions. Thus we would never shorten *I have you covered* to *I've you covered*; instead we would say, *I've got you covered*. *Have got* is also an informal synonym for *have* in the sense of *possess*. Both these uses of *got* are usually to be avoided in formal writing.

512. **let's say:** This expression should be omitted entirely from writing.

wrong	Let's say for example a relative dies, a poor family will have to deal with financial worries as well as with grief.
right	If a relative dies a poor family will have to deal with financial worries as well as with grief.

513. **like** (to mean *say* or *indicate through gesture)*: An expressive idiom, but one to be avoided in writing.

conversation	She's like, "Why do we have to be here?" and I'm like, "Duh!"
formal	She wondered why we had to be there; to me it was obvious.

514. **off** (to mean *from*)

wrong	I got it off him for two dollars.
right	I bought it from him for two dollars.

515. **put across, get across** (one's point): express, convince

wrong He could not get his point across.
right He could not persuade us he was right.

516. **well**: In conversation *well* is often added to sentences while you are thinking of what to say. Do not do this in writing.

wrong Well, at the end of the war there was some doubt within the Cabinet as to which course to take.
right At the end of the war there was some doubt within the Cabinet as to which course to take.

517. **when you get right down to it**: usually best omitted; use *otherwise, indeed,* or *in fact*.